

BLADE OF THE BUCCANEERS, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

OCTOBER

25 CENTS



DONALD B. CHIDSEY • H. BEDFORD-JONES
ELLERY QUEEN • JAMES BAUM • ROBERT MILL
A Red Wolf of Arabia story by WILLIAM MAKIN



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By

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By DONALD

BARR CHIDSEY

This month our customary novelette was crowded out by the unusual length of Mr. Destiny; but next month it resumes its place. And a mighty lively tale it is, too—a modern and most unusual detective story by Donald Barr Chidsey, who wrote our complete novel, “Blade of the Buccaneers,” in this issue.

Short Stories by

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FREDERICK BECHDOLT

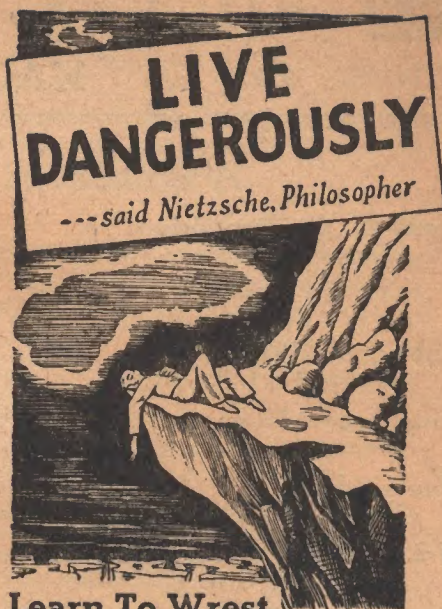
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BLUE BOOK



OCTOBER, 1939

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Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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***D**ID you know that British soldiers in Palestine are carrying red umbrellas? William Makin, who has just finished a newspaper job that took him around the world, has sent us from Bagdad this highly dramatic story based on personal observation.*



A startling adventure of
the Red Wolf of Arabia

By WILLIAM MAKIN

Illustrated by L. R. Gustafson

"Get inside and find your man!" the lieutenant ordered.

IN the morning sunshine of Bethlehem, the green-painted armored car throbbed across the square. Machine-guns pointed from slits at the side. The helmets of the soldiers within bobbed up in sinister fashion.

"Tumble out, four men!" commanded a lieutenant. "Jukes, Banks, Tomkinson and Smythe. All correct?"

"All correct, sir," said Lance-corporal Jukes.

The four soldiers of the Somerset Regiment straightened themselves in the sunshine, their rifles slung from their shoulders and grasped with sun-browned hands ready for immediate use. Their khaki shirts were open at the neck, and the gray dust of the Palestine road was on their faces. Behind them was a blind wall of stone rising into a fortress-like pile of

buildings. It was the Church of the Nativity. Only a small black hole of a doorway, a protection against sudden assault by Moslems or against the entry of camels, relieved the solid frontage. The four soldiers had their backs to it.

"That's the place!" indicated the lieutenant.

He was frowning toward a leaning skyscraper of an Arab house, heavy with fretted balconies. The ground portion was a café. Tables and chairs spilled on to the cracked pavements. Many Arabs squatted there with coffee-cups. They gazed sullenly at the group of soldiers. Mangy dogs nosed forward, suspiciously.

"Get inside and find your man!" the lieutenant ordered.

Obedient to the command, the four khaki-clad figures marched confidently



Bethlehem—1939

toward the Arab house. A machine-gun from inside the armored car swiveled menacingly in the same direction. The lieutenant jumped down from the car and stood with his hand upon a pistol.

The Arabs seemed to raise themselves from their chairs as though ready to leap into action at any moment. One or two spat ostentatiously as the four khaki-clad soldiers stamped through the serried ranks of tables and chairs and made their way to the heavy darkness of the café beyond. There a fat, yellowish face with haunted raisin-like eyes came floating toward them like a comic balloon at a party in the dark.

"Good mornings, soldiers," wheezed the balloon in bad English. "I am Alexander Musagh, proprietor of these establishments." He was an Armenian, and his face was stamped with the fear of imminent massacre. "You want beers?" he added, as though temporizing with death.

"We want Abu Hussein," said Lance-corporal Jukes, briefly. "Where is he?"

"So! Abu Hussein!" mouthed the Armenian. He glanced round at the Arabs with increasing fear.

"He's here, isn't he?" snapped Jukes.

"Oh, yess."

"In his room?"

"Yess."

"Lead the way!"

It looked as though the balloon face had been pricked. It was sagging before their eyes. Nevertheless, with the queer inhuman noises of a camel rising from the ground, the Armenian led the way up a broken staircase to the crazy heights above. At long last the third landing was reached. The floor sloped. It seemed that the party of four soldiers and the fat Armenian must overbalance the whole edifice as they shuffled toward a doorway. The Armenian produced a key.

"Got him locked up, eh?" said Lance-corporal Jukes with satisfaction.

"I thought it better—for the moments," sighed the Armenian. "You will

One by one, each Arab pulled out a strip of dried palm-leaf from the clenched fist.



find him insides," he added, despairingly flinging open the door.

The soldiers shuffled into the room. A shaft of dusty sunlight showed Abu Hussein lying on the bed—a tall, distinguished Arab, garbed in the long white gown of burial. The head was swathed in white cloths. The face was that of a man who had undergone agony.

He was dead.

Jukes started back abruptly as he touched that stiffened arm.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"Sometimes in the night," said the Armenian.

"How did he die?"

"Who can tell? He was not killed with a knife like the first man. I did not find him hanging from the roof like the second. But he is dead—as though from frights."

"So that's the third man they've got," muttered Jukes.

"The *Mujahidin*, the fighters in the Holy War, are all-powerfuls," said the Armenian fearfully.

"When did you find him?"

"Two hours ago. He been dead some time. I have arranged the burings for

twelve o'clock. I am very worried at these deaths in my establishments. It ees not good for business."

The fat Armenian rocked himself as though he was certain the next victim would be himself.

"Nothing more to be done here."

Lance-corporal Jukes gave a perfunctory glance round the room, eyed the body distastefully again, and marched out of the room, followed by the other khaki-clad figures.

Arrived again in the square, Jukes reported briefly to the lieutenant.

"So they got Hussein too," mused the lieutenant, fingering his pistol. "Well, I expected it. Seems that very few lodgers in that Arab house leave the place alive. All right, jump in!"

The soldiers clambered into the armored car. Watched by the Arabs, it slowly circled the square, the machine-guns still menacing. Then, in a flurry of dust, it surged along the road leading to Jerusalem.

Nobody seemed to have noticed that although four khaki figures had entered the Arab cafe, only three had come forth again into the square. . . .



The fat man gazed fearfully at the strip as he drew.

Beside the dead body of Abu Hussein, the khaki-clad soldier who had answered to the name of Smythe was unwrapping the white cloths that swathed the head of the Arab. He bent down to examine a series of scratches on the throat. Could these have caused the tortured expression? Carefully he replaced the cloths.

Then the soldier began to strip himself of his uniform. He lifted the chin-strap and took off the shrapnel-helmet. A smooth crop of red hair was revealed. A slim, sun-browned hand took down the finely stitched burnous of the dead Arab, which hung from a nail on the wall. Within five minutes the British soldier had transformed himself into an Arab.

He calmly opened the door, stood for a second listening, and then padded quietly in sandaled feet toward the café below. He passed the Armenian in the darkness. The proprietor shrank back and visibly trembled.

"This is madness. I shall be the next to die," he whimpered.

"Fool of a babbler," came the reply in Arabic, "forget you speak English, or the grave will surely receive you."

"*Insh'allah!*" moaned the Armenian fatalistically.

"SO the evacuation of Bethlehem is now complete, eh?" said the High Commissioner, passing the decanter of port to his companion at the dinner-table.

"We've withdrawn as far as Rachel's tomb on the outskirts," explained Gen-

eral Lansing, the G.O.C. "I've got the Somersets encamped there, some armored cars, and a couple of planes."

"Where are your other reserves?"

"In and around Jerusalem. I'm thankful things are quiet in the old city. I judged it best to withdraw from Bethlehem," went on the General, gnawing at his gray mustache. "The Somersets lost fifteen men there last week—shot in the streets. Those Arab murderers are all over the town. I decided to let the assassins stew among the bricks and mortar."

"It's wise to avoid further loss of life," agreed the High Commissioner, frowning at his cigar. "Still—"

"Yes sir?" The General sensed that all was not well.

"I had an urgent message from London today," went on Sir Leonard Faverham. "From the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Says we must get the Arab delegate from Bethlehem district over to the conference in London at once. There can be no hope of a settlement of this Palestine problem until Arabs and Jews are sitting round a table thrashing it out among themselves."

"Easier said than done," sighed the General. "The local Arab committee appointed three delegates in rapid succession. Two were found dead the morning after their appointment. The third, a very sound Arab indeed, Abu Hussein—"

"I've met and talked with him," nodded Sir Leonard. "He has influence with the moderates, too."

"—was found dead in Bethlehem this morning," continued the General. "We sent an armored car for him. We ought to have sent a hearse!"

"ARE they appointing another delegate?" asked Sir Leonard.

"Tonight, I believe."

"Can you get him to the airport, tomorrow?"

"If the extremists don't get him first," said the General. "That secret society, 'Fighters in the Holy War,' as they call themselves, have been a considerable nuisance to us for months."

"Yes, I understand I'm on their blacklist," said Sir Leonard, dryly. He examined the glowing end of his cigar with interest.

"I hope to smash 'em, in time," said the General. "At the moment I've got a first-class man on the spot."

"In Bethlehem?"

"At the meeting of the Arab Committee."

The High Commissioner raised his eyebrows in slight astonishment.

"That's interesting. Who is the fellow? An Arab?"

The General shook his head.

"Ever heard of Paul Rodgers?"

"Paul Rodgers—" mused the High Commissioner. "Wasn't he the fellow whom the natives used to call the Red Wolf of Arabia?"

"That's the man."

"His extraordinary *dossier* of adventures was handed to me when I left London," said the High Commissioner. "I recall making inquiries about him when I arrived here. American parentage, I believe. . . . But the fellow seemed to have vanished. I was told he was most likely in the desert somewhere—dead or alive."

"He's alive all right—or at least, I hope so," said the General, looking at the clock. "If you had wanted to meet Paul Rodgers some days ago, sir, you might have seen him by looking out of that window." He indicated the heavily curtained window of the High Commissioner's house that overlooked the hill garden and the city of Jerusalem beyond. "He was on sentry duty for four hours, in the garden."

"Then he's—"

"A private in the Somersets," chuckled the General. "Came to me a year ago and begged permission to enlist under a *nom-de-guerre*. I pointed out how tremendously useful he could be to us in

Intelligence. He refused my offers. Said something about being sick of the whole Arab question, himself, and apparently everybody else. Wanted time to think. I emphasized that soldiers, good soldiers, were not expected to think. He smiled, and said that was exactly why he wanted to enlist in the ranks."

"And you took him at his word?"

"Couldn't do anything else. The fellow has a way with him. He's made a damned good soldier, too. Three times he's been put up for promotion by his sergeant, and refused it."

"The desert seems to produce some queer characters," pondered the High Commissioner. "First we have Lawrence, and now this man Rodgers. D'you think the desert sun cracks 'em?"

"I've had three years of it," admitted the General, "and there are moments when I doubt my sanity. Rodgers may be cracked. But the fellow has a flair, I might almost say a genius, for pulling off a *coup*."

"Well, if even half that *dossier* I read was true," said the High Commissioner, "I think— Anyhow, you say he's in Bethlehem tonight?"

"I sent for him yesterday and made an appeal," nodded General Lansing. "Said that our only hope of a settlement of this distressful Palestine business was by getting Jews and Arabs at a conference in Whitehall. Our main difficulty was to get the elected Arabs safely away from the country before the *Mujahidin* murdered them. We were waiting only for the Bethlehem delegate. Unfortunately, this was the moment when we had to evacuate the town."

"WHAT did he say?" asked the High Commissioner, helping himself to another glass of port.

"He said that if we failed to collect the third delegate, I could expect him with a truly representative Arab before ten o'clock in the morning."

"The fellow seems sure of himself."

"So sure, that I didn't hesitate over his terms."

"Oh, he made terms, eh?"

"Asked for a week's leave," smiled the General. "I asked him where he wanted to go. He talked vaguely of a little room with a piano at the top of a house in Jerusalem. He wanted to spend a week there, apparently just playing the piano."

"The fellow is cracked," snorted the High Commissioner.

"Nevertheless, he's worth trying."

"Anyone is worth trying—to satisfy Whitehall," said the High Commissioner, turning expectantly as a servant entered the room with a message on a salver. The message was for General Lansing, who opened it and cursed softly.

"What is it?" asked the High Commissioner petulantly.

"They've exploded a mine on the road just outside Bethlehem. These Arabs know all the tricks, nowadays. That means I can't get an armored car into Bethlehem in the morning to pick up Rodgers and the delegate."

"Can't you rush the town?"

"I could. I might lose a dozen men. It's expensive—for one Arab delegate."

"I've got to have that Arab delegate on his way to London tomorrow," fumed the High Commissioner, "Whitehall is getting tired of excuses."

"Maybe I'll have to smash my way into Bethlehem again," said the General. "That is, unless Rodgers succeeds."

NEWS of the blowing up of the road outside of Bethlehem reached Paul Rodgers as he sat in the now crowded café overlooking the square of the Church of the Nativity.

It came with the simultaneous roar of the distant explosion, wild shouts, and the relentless booming of the radio in Arabic. All day the Italian radio at Bari had been denouncing the so-called British "oppression" in Palestine. Drinking their coffee, the Arabs had listened listlessly to the bawling loud-speaker.

A youth scampered in with the news of the destruction of the road. Many of the Arabs nodded in satisfaction. One group at a long table began to chant softly:

*"El Billad billadna,
Wa el Yahud kellabna."
("The land is our land,
And the Jews are our dogs.")*

But to Red Rodgers that explosion meant that he was marooned in Bethlehem, for the one road of escape by armored car was now smashed.

From beneath the blue-and-white Arab headress his gray eyes narrowed as he watched the Armenian proprietor casually drifting from one table to another, and giving a little significant nod to individuals. These Arabs, mostly better dressed than the usual loungers of the café, left their tables one by one and drifted into the darkness at the back. Rodgers heard the shuffle of their slippers as they moved up the stairs. He



"Look out!" shouted Rodgers, as the cat launched itself at the throat of Hahlb.

too rose from the table and followed a portly Arab.

A few seconds after the portly one disappeared through a doorway on the landing, Red Rodgers also entered the room. The six faces of squatting Arabs looked up nervously. Rodgers regarded them.

"May the peace of Allah be on all here," he said softly.

"Allah is great," was the inevitable reply.

"Who is this newcomer?" asked the fat man. "I have not seen his face before."

A venerable, bearded Arab who sat a little apart from the others in the room, answered:

"He comes from the Inglezi."

"From the Inglezi!"



Rodgers was piloting his companion toward the Grotto of the Nativity; he had a plan in mind.

The others seemed more nervous than ever. Rodgers smiled coolly and squatted among them.

"Brothers," he said, "it is agreed that we all desire peace in this unhappy land, the peace of Allah. I am come to see that your elected representative goes safely to the conference in London. That is why I am here."

"*Wallah!* There is boasting in your mouth," said the fat one. "What can one man do where all of us have failed? Three men have we elected, and each died a violent death. The murderous hand of the *Mujahidin* stretches among us even here."

"I shall cut off that hand," went on Rodgers in flowery Arabic.

"Who dares to think he is more powerful than the Fighters in the Holy War?"

said the fat man, opening his greedy eyes. "What is your name?"

"I may be known to some of you as the Red Wolf of Arabia."

"*Wallah!* Al Ared! The red-haired one!"

The muttering faces were turned toward him with interest. The venerable Arab rose.

"Enough has been said," he quavered. "We all know that we are gathered here this evening to elect yet another delegate to the conference in London. Our honored friend Abu Hussein—may Allah greet him in Paradise—did not live to complete his mission."

"He was murdered," said the fat man.

"Are you each willing to draw the lots again so that one of you may take his place?"

The Arab faces were tense. They were all brave men, yet this meeting of Arabs who desired peace had taken on the sinister atmosphere of a suicide club. Some in the group were respected citizens, men of property, merchants. All ardently desired peace in Palestine. But the Fighters in the Holy War had decreed a bitter feud to the end. So these men hesitated.

"I am willing," said the fat man, rising from his squatting position. It seemed to Red Rodgers that the greedy eyes were challenging the others in the room.

The lead was sufficient. One by one they nodded, though it might mean death to still another of them.

"Then I command you to draw the strips of palm," said the venerable leader. "One of them is shorter than the others. He who draws it is our elected delegate."

He brought forth a gnarled brown hand from behind his back. In the clenched fist were strips of dried palm-leaves. The Arabs rose. One by one, each pulled a strip from the clenched fist. Only Red Rodgers remained squatting, his gray eyes watching keenly.

Each Arab looked at the other. The fat man gazed fearfully at the strip as he drew. Then all faces turned toward a slim, boyish Arab whose beard was only just sprouting. He was gazing as if fascinated at a short strip of palm.

"So the honor has come to you, Nasir Habib!" said the bearded leader. "You are young and upright: We are proud that you should represent us. We shall pray to Allah for your safety."

The old man bowed his head, and muttered a prayer from the Koran. The others followed. All except two: the fat man looked in the direction of the Arab youth, while Red Rodgers half closed his eyes with a suggestion of weariness.

THE prayer finished, the old man embraced the youth.

"You know our desires, our wishes," he quavered. "We can rely upon you to tell the Inglezi on what terms there can be peace between Arab and Jew." He beckoned to Paul Rodgers. "We deliver our brother into your hands. Should he fail to reach the conference in London safely, his blood will be upon your head. And we shall not waste other valuable lives for such a purpose. *Insh'allah*, I have spoken."

Rodgers did not flinch from the stern words of the old man.

"Whatever happens will be the will of Allah," he said quietly.

The group began to shuffle out of the room—all except Red Rodgers and the youth Nasir Habib. They regarded each other in silence. The youth was about to say something, when the fearful face of the Armenian appeared at the door.

"Your room is prepared for the night, Nasir Habib," he said.

The youth shivered slightly. He knew only too well that it had been a call to a death-chamber for three other men.

IT was inevitably to that same room whence but a few hours ago the body of the third Arab delegate had been removed, that Nasir Habib was now conducted. The Armenian was apologetic.

"It is, alas, the only room in my lodging which is vacant," he said in Arabic. "But you are young and strong." He eyed the youth dubiously. "Nothing will happen to you," he concluded; and leaving a small oil lamp on a shelf, he took his departure.

The youth gazed about him with that slow, intent stare of the Arab; in the flickering flame of the oil lamp he could see only the bare plaster walls and his own gigantic shadow across them. He looked at the long, low divan which served as a bed, and again he shivered. He stepped quietly to the window and looked out. It was a narrow byway, with a sheer drop from the window of a hundred feet.

A slight noise caused him to twist suddenly. The door was opening. The youth's hand went to the curved dagger at his waist. Then his hand halted on the hilt as the lithe figure of Paul Rodgers stepped quietly into the room.

The youth and the man appraised each other in silence for a few moments. Then Red Rodgers held out his hand.

"You are a brave man, Nasir Habib," he said.

The other clasped it with a shy smile.

"To bring peace instead of terror to this land demands brave men," said the youth. "I have heard of you, Al Ared. Your adventures were recounted to me by an old servant. *Wallah*, what a man!" he said. The youth withdrew his hand. "I am proud to be your companion in this adventure. When do we leave Bethlehem?"

"Before the dawn," said the Intelligence officer. "It had been arranged for an armored car to be in the square below to take us both away. That is now impossible. The road—"

"I understand," nodded the youth. "It has been blown up—destroyed."

"Yes—we must find another way out of Bethlehem," said Rodgers.

"Is there another way?" asked the youth.

The quiet conversation in the little room was suddenly broken by the distant report of a rifle-shot. It was followed by a *rat-a-tat* of machine-gun fire. Arab rebels were firing on the British. It seemed that the two men would have to run the gantlet of that fire.

"We must find a way out," said Rodgers. "In the meantime I have decided to share this room with you until the hour of departure."

A tinge of color came to the brown cheeks of the Arab.

"I shall consider it an honor," he said quietly, and with obvious relief.

RODGERS knelt in a corner and drew forth a bundle. It was the khaki uniform in which, as Private Smythe, he had entered the café.

"I would like you to wear this uniform," he said to the Arab youth.

"Is that necessary? I am an Arab, and I prefer the national dress."

"Until we are outside Bethlehem, I beg of you to obey me implicitly," said Rodgers.

The Arab shrugged, and took up the uniform. He was surprised to see Rodgers produce from his voluminous burnous a blood-red object which resolved itself into a red umbrella.

"What is that?" he asked curiously.

"As you see, a red umbrella," smiled Rodgers. "You will carry it under your arm when you are in the khaki uniform. It is part of the equipment for soldiers in action."

The young Arab chuckled.

"I thought only the Chinese soldiers went into battle with umbrellas."

"I will explain its use when—" began Rodgers, and then broke off, suddenly. He was staring at a corner of the room. Nasir Habib followed his gaze. He saw only a saucer in which was a little milk.

"You have some pet with you—a cat?" asked the Intelligence officer abruptly.

"No, no," smiled the Arab. "But I like cats. I do not mind them. There is something holy in the cat."

"You didn't place that saucer of milk there?" insisted Rodgers.

Again the Arab shook his head, and began to change into the uniform.

"No. It may have been the pet of Abu Hussein. Poor little beast! It will be homeless now."

"Not entirely," mused Red Rodgers. "So long as that saucer of milk remains there, then—"

The Arab youth was chuckling. He had stepped to the door.

"But you are right, Al Ared," he said. "I can hear the cat scratching at the door. The poor little beast wants its milk."

"Don't open—" began the Intelligence officer, but he was too late. The scratching at the door had become frantic. Nasir Habib jerked it open. There stepped delicately into the room with arched back and upright tail, a scraggy black cat.

"You see," smiled the Arab. "A harmless cat. A good-luck omen, too."

He bent down to stroke it, but the cat had already seen the saucer of milk and padded swiftly to the corner.

The two men in the little room watched it. Nasir Habib, a half-naked figure in the khaki shorts of a British soldier, stood at the side of Paul Rodgers, lean and watchful in the Arab burnous. The scraggy black cat licked at the saucer hungrily. In a few moments the milk had disappeared. The cat turned, licking its long whiskers. Its yellow eyes turned toward the two men. There was something baleful in its stare.

It stretched out a paw and bared the claws. Those claws seemed to fascinate Red Rodgers. He leaned forward to look at them closer. They were tinted with some substance and were cruelly sharp.

"I think I understand," he muttered.

Swiftly he moved to the divan and stripped the sheet from it. Nasir Habib was still staring at the scraggy creature. It seemed to have hypnotized him; again, instinctively, he bent forward to stroke it. The cat raised its yellow orbs and arched its back.

"Look out!" shouted Rodgers.

WITH a preliminary quiver, the cat launched itself full at the throat of Nasir Habib. But Rodgers had lurched against the Arab and flung him against the wall. Spitting furiously, the cat missed in its leap and sent the oil lamp dashing to the ground. The room was plunged into darkness. The cat clung to the shelf, its luminous eyes staring down on the two crouching figures.

"This is foolish play," muttered the Arab. "What does it mean, Al Ared?"

"The cat means death, if once its claws reach your throat as they did that of Abu Hussein," said Rodgers. "Be ready! It's going to jump again."

Once again the scraggy black body leaped into the darkness. They could not see it—only the baleful eyes swinging toward them. Yet once again they escaped; and looked round fearfully in the darkness. They glimpsed the yellow eyes gleaming madly in their direction.

Nasir Habib gave a little cry of fear as he saw the cat preparing to leap at his naked chest. His back was against the wall, and there was no escape. But even as the yellow orbs came swinging through the darkness, something fluttered in front of him. It was Rodgers, with the sheet. He had caught the cat and was twisting it into a suffocating bundle that clawed helplessly.

"Quick, the lamp!" said Red Rodgers, thrusting a box of matches into the hand of the Arab.

With trembling fingers Nasir Habib spurted a flame. Rodgers was completing the bundle. He went to the window, opened it, and let the bundle run to the end of the twisted sheet. Then he tied the end to a bar. The cat was hanging over the byway.

"I still don't understand," whispered the Arab, shielding the flickering flame with his hand.

The Intelligence officer had opened the door and was listening. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night. The café

loungers had gone home, and all was quiet. The habit of the curfew enforced by the British still remained, even though the British troops were no longer in Bethlehem.

Rodgers closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"The cat's claws were poisoned," he said. "And the beast is made mad by some drug in the milk—possibly a bit of morphine, which to cats, instead of acting as a sedative, drives them insane. . . . It has been taught to attack human beings. The saucer of milk in the room is the bait that lures it. Then it attacks with its



Rodgers had fired his last cartridge. . . . Automatic in his fist, came the portly Arab. "You shall die like a dog!" he yelled.

poisoned claws anyone within reach. That is how Abu Hussein died. There were scratches at his throat as though he had clawed himself in an agony of suffocation. Actually those marks were poison, scratched in by a mad cat."

"Horrible!" shivered the Arab. "Who, in the name of Allah, can have prepared such a plot instead of facing a man in fair combat?"

"When we find the man who placed that saucer of milk in the room, then we have the murderer of the three Arab delegates," said Red Rodgers. "But we dare not linger here now. Finish your dressing. And don't forget the red umbrella. We must begin our escape from Bethlehem at once."

IT still lacked some hours before the dawn when an Arab dressed as a British soldier, and Paul Rodgers dressed as an Arab, stole out of the little room in the lodging at Bethlehem. The whole of that crazy leaning house was shrouded in silence. But to the Intelligence officer, and even the tense Arab, the silence itself seemed to have hundreds of watchful eyes.

As they went quietly down the stairs, a door behind them opened quietly. The portly Arab who had attended the secret meeting stood there, unobserved by the two men who had entered the dark solitude of the café. There was a look of baffled rage on his face. In his hand he held a saucer of milk. Swiftly and silently he returned to his room and moved to the window. He fumbled for what appeared to be a box of matches. He struck one, and an unearthly greenish flare materialized.

In the hot darkness of the square fronting the Church of the Nativity, Rodgers was suddenly aware of that green flare showing from a window of the lodging. Simultaneously, white-robed figures began to emerge from the deep shadows.

"Quick, we're discovered!" whispered Rodgers, and dragging the young Arab by the arm, he raced across the square in the direction of the Church.

He bent down toward the black hole which was the only entrance. To his relief, the door swung open. He dragged the Arab inside, and quickly bolted the door behind him. Lighted colored lamps revealed the familiar scene. The red stone columns supported the old roof of English oak, and in the gloom could be discerned the curtained arcades with their concealed altars. One of these curtains

was thrust aside, and a pale, black-robed priest of the Greek Church came rustling toward them.

"This is sacrilege," declared the priest, lifting his hands. "That door is never closed to worshipers."

"It is sanctuary that I claim," replied Rodgers, and as the fists of his pursuers hammered against the door, he added: "It is the unbelievers outside who would force their way into the Church and desecrate it."

The priest stared doubtfully at the man in Arab robes who spoke rapidly in English. But already Rodgers was piloting his companion across the mosaic pavement, toward the Grotto of the Nativity. Rapidly they descended the slippery steps hewn out of the rock. They passed through the cave where Christ wailed as a babe, and which now was decorated with numerous lamps, figures of saints, embroidery and a variety of sacred ornaments.

Rodgers had a plan in mind. While serving as a soldier in Bethlehem, he had spent some hours with French archaeologists who had been digging in this vast subterranean area beneath the Church. They had discovered one grotto leading into another. And they had partly explored a passage which appeared to lead beyond Bethlehem and come out near to the tomb of Rachel. It was toward that tunnel which Red Rodgers now led his Arab companion.

Soon they had passed the cracked and crumbling tombs of old Crusaders. They were crawling on their hands and knees amidst rubble, the rough-hewn roof being only a few inches above their bowed backs. They skirted a discarded skeleton, the skull grinning in the light of an electric torch which Rodgers flashed into the blackness. It seemed to Nasir Habib that they were doomed to die in these black catacombs. Twice they had turned back on coming against a dead end of rock. Both were wet with perspiration.

BUT at last Rodgers gave a grunt of satisfaction. They were crawling along a tunnel where the air seemed less of the grave. The Intelligence officer struck a match to test it. The flame wavered feebly. The next moment a bat winged toward the match and darkness descended again.

"This must be it!" gasped Rodgers.

A grayness was visible in the distance. There was no mistaking the cool morning air that came to their streaked faces.

With an effort, Rodgers pushed a boulder aside, scrambled on through, and helped Nasir Habib after him. Then both men raised their faces gratefully to the sky, which was already streaked with the pink of dawn.

They had come out in a boulder-strewn ravine, a cracked fissure in the earth. Cliffs towered on both sides; they would have to be climbed. But above them was safety, and in the distance, as Rodgers guessed, the British would be encamped.

There was a small pool among the rocks. Nasir Habib stumbled toward it and flung himself face downward to drink greedily. He raised himself with a sigh of relief. Rodgers was moving toward him. At that moment a shot rang out and echoed in the ravine. A splutter of earth where the bullet had hit splattered the face of the startled Arab.

"Down on your face again," shouted Rodgers. "The rebels have discovered us. They knew the secret of those catacombs, after all."

With the bitter realization that they were trapped, he stretched himself behind a boulder beside the prone Nasir Habib. More shots echoed, the bullets twanging toward them. Rodgers drew forth an automatic pistol and waited for the rebels to reveal themselves. Nasir Habib, who had carried a rifle through the catacombs, dragged it to his shoulder and slipped the safety-catch.

THE unequal battle had raged for half an hour. Slowly but surely the invisible rebels were closing in upon the two men and were taking advantage of every crevice and boulder in that ravine. They fired, and then moved their positions. Rodgers realized that it would be impossible to fight back until the rebels were almost upon them.

He looked in vain for a relief patrol from the British camp. He was certain the firing must have been heard. But an enemy fighting within that ravine would be difficult to detect, and any patrol trying to rush it would be massacred. The bullets fired by the rebels were now splintering the rocks and spurting the earth within a few yards of the two men. Still withholding his fire, he gazed about him anxiously.

He saw a crack in the cliff face that might give a chance of escape to a good climber. He indicated it to his companion.

"D'you think you could manage that climb, Nasir Habib?" he asked. "You

will be hidden from the rebels until you near the top."

"*Wallah!* It is child's-play," declared the youth. "But," he added, sighting a keen eye along the rifle, "these accursed dogs would rush us the moment we ceased to fire back at them. They could pick us off as easily as goats."

"Give me the rifle." Rodgers held out his hand. "Now take this pistol and begin to climb."

"I cannot leave you here, Al Ared," said the young Arab determinedly.

"You obey my commands, implicitly," said the Intelligence officer, a stern look in his gray eyes. "Listen carefully! Once you reach the top of the cliff—and may Allah take you there safely—you will move across the fields in the direction of the British camp. It should not be far."

"I think I know where the Inglezi are camped," said the Arab sullenly.

"But do not fail to walk across the fields with the red umbrella open above your head," said Rodgers.

"Why such foolishness, Al Ared?"

"Because British airplanes will be scouting up there. They will be searching for rebels and the source of this shooting. You see, already they come."

Even as he spoke, the loud drone of a Royal Air Force machine was heard. Flying low, it came over the ravine, banked, and circled round. It had sighted the source of the shooting.

"When the pilots see a man beneath a red umbrella," went on Rodgers, "they know that he is a British soldier. They will not attack you in mistake for a rebel. Now, do you understand?"

"*Wallah*, but you are a very brave man, Al Ared," said Nasir Habib, returning the compliment paid to him.

"Get to it!" ordered Rodgers tersely.

Nasir Habib began to wriggle toward the crack in the cliff. At the same time Rodgers, nestling his cheek against the rifle, fired. He had the satisfaction of seeing a rebel tumble across a boulder. The other rebels redoubled their fire.

GLANCING over a shoulder, Rodgers saw that the lad was already clambering up the crack. He revealed all the Arab agility in the climb. For the moment, he was not in view of the rebels. Once again Rodgers fired. He missed, and cursed softly as an answering bullet whined within a few inches of his head. He knew the rebels were closing in quickly, for they realized that the airplane had spotted the fighting, and that as soon

as the sunshine came into the ravine, they would be discovered.

It was at that moment that one of the rebels in his excitement raised himself and pointed: he had seen the climbing figure of Nasir Habib. But even as he raised himself, Rodgers sighted and fired. The rebel, still with outstretched hand, sprawled to the ground.

THERE was a sudden burst of firing by the rebels. But their bullets were not directed toward Rodgers. Fearfully, he gazed upward. There was no sign of Nasir Habib. Had he been shot, and now lay in the crevice, hurt? Rodgers could not tell. He dared not move from the shelter of the boulder. The fire of the rebels was again directed toward him. It seemed that having killed one of the fugitives, they were determined to kill the other.

They were less than a hundred yards away, and Rodgers was using his ammunition recklessly. Time was precious. He considered making a dash for the crack in the cliff himself, but realized if he were not shot in that desperate attempt the Arabs would wait patiently until he climbed into view; then they would shoot him down with ease. A furtive peep by one of the rebels caused him to jerk the trigger again; the Arab pitched forward.

But the rebels had gained a few more yards. Shafts of sunlight were beginning to cut their way into the ravine. Rodgers glimpsed a figure in the background who seemed to be the leader, a portly man who flourished a pistol. Rodgers fired, and missed. He knew now who was the traitor at those meetings. He was the man with the mad cat, the killer of three brave men who had died because they desired peace in the Holy Land.

A shout echoed in the ravine:

"Can you hear me, Al Ared?"

He recognized the voice of the fat man.

"I hear you."

"I give you two minutes to surrender yourself. If you do not throw away your gun and walk toward us with your hands over your head, by Allah, you will soon be a dead man."

"Is my worthless self of such value that you want to take me alive?" asked the Intelligence officer.

"I have my reasons," came the reply.

"In two minutes I will give you my reply," temporized Rodgers.

He waited anxiously. A sudden silence seemed to have descended upon the ra-

vine. Not even the sound of a solitary airplane could be heard. Bitterly Rodgers realized that Nasir Habib must have failed to get through. The smashed body of the Arab youth was lying in the crack. Soon his own body would—

"The two minutes are ended!" came the shout of the fat man.

"And may Allah send you all to damnation," shouted back Rodgers, sighting along his rifle for the rush.

They came, in a fanatical frenzy, to finish him off. One, two, three sprawled dead before him. And at that moment the whole ravine crashed with rifle-fire. Rodgers glimpsed the khaki figures of the Somersets wriggling along the cliffs and firing down upon the group of rebels, who could be seen easily from that vantage-point.

The rush of the rebels toward the solitary figure halted. Quickly they wriggled for shelter and turned to flee. But they were hopelessly trapped. The portly Arab rose, rage distorting his features.

"Fight on, you dogs!" he cried to the scuttling rebels.

Rodgers sighted on him and pulled the trigger. Only a click followed. He had fired his last cartridge. The portly Arab seemed to realize it. An evil grin came over his face, and with the automatic pistol in his pudgy fist, he came toward Red Rodgers with that surprising agility sometimes displayed by fat men.

"At least, you shall die like a dog!" he yelled.

Then he stopped, abruptly. A look of pained surprise came over his face. He fell to his knees and rolled absurdly at the feet of Red Rodgers. Looking up to see who had fired that single shot, Rodgers saw a khaki-clad figure waving to him, and recognized Nasir Habib.

A MOMENT later, the two companions were gripping each other's shoulders, Arab fashion. A British officer, a smile of satisfaction on his face, was clambering over the boulders toward them. Rodgers stiffened and saluted. The officer returned the salute.

"Good work—er—Private Smythe," he said. "The General has a car to take you both to Lydda airport. Better get a move on."

"Thank you, sir," said Rodgers.

"Carry on!" nodded the officer, and without a second glance at the two men, he strolled casually toward the prone bodies of the rebels.

Another stirring story of the Red Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.

*A famous detective attends
a heavyweight championship
fight and finds murder
done both in the ring and
out of it.*

MIND over Matter

By ELLERY QUEEN



Illustrated by Charles Chickering

PAULA PARIS found Inspector Richard Queen of the Homicide Squad inconsolable when she arrived in New York. She understood how he felt, for she had flown in from Hollywood expressly to cover the heavyweight fight between Champion Mike Brown and Challenger Jim Koyle, who were signed to box fifteen rounds at the Stadium that night for the championship of the world.

"You poor dear," said Paula. "And how about you, Master Mind? Aren't you disappointed too, that you can't buy a ticket to the fight?" she asked Mr. Ellery Queen.

"I'm a jinx," said the great man gloomily. "If I went, something catastrophic would be sure to happen. So why should I want to go?"

"I thought witnessing catastrophes was why people go to fights."

"Oh, I don't mean anything gentle like a knockout. Something grimmer."

"He's afraid somebody will knock somebody off," said the Inspector.

"Well, doesn't somebody always?" demanded his son.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Paula," said the Inspector impatiently. "Look, you're a newspaper woman. Can you get me a ticket?"

"You may as well get me one, too," groaned Mr. Queen.

So Miss Paris smiled and telephoned Phil Maguire, the famous sports editor,

and spoke so persuasively to Mr. Maguire that he picked them up that evening in his cranky little sports roadster and they all drove uptown to the Stadium together to see the brawl.

"How do you figure the fight, Maguire?" asked Inspector Queen respectfully.

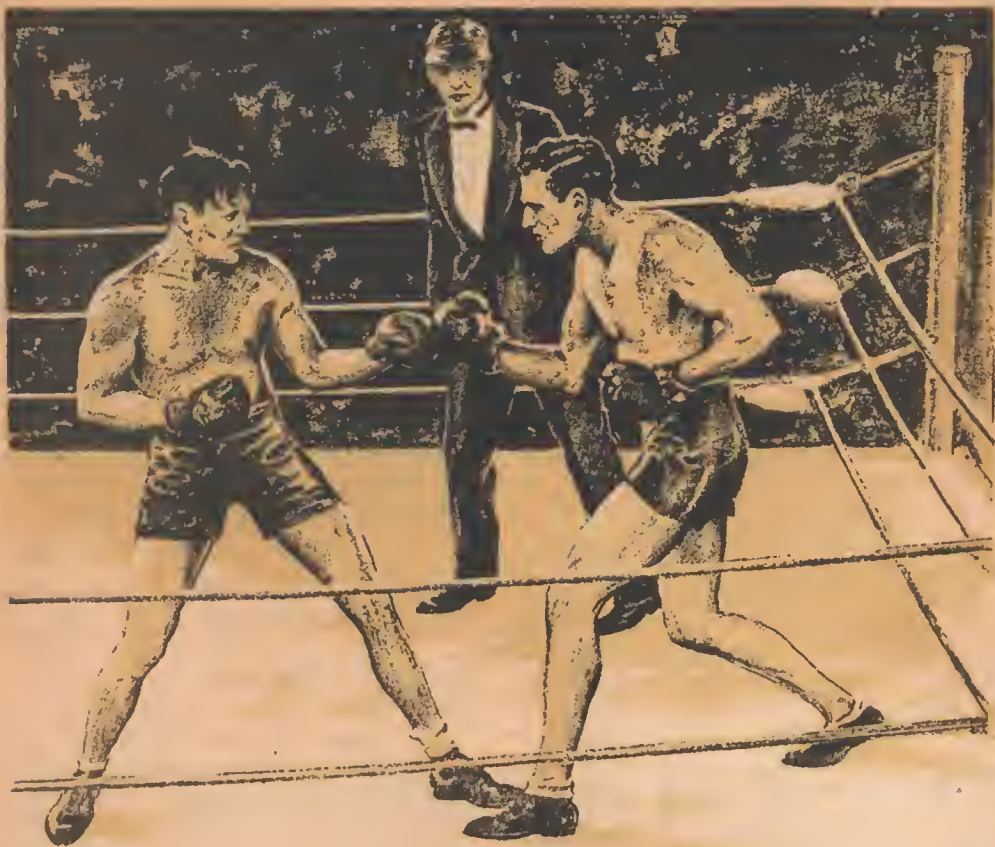
"On this how-de-do," said Maguire, "Maguire doesn't care to be quoted."

"Seems to me the champ ought to take this boy Koyle."

Maguire shrugged.

"Phil's sour on the champion," laughed Paula. "Phil and Mike Brown haven't been cuddly since Mike won the title."

"Nothing personal, y'understand," said Phil Maguire. "Only, remember Kid Berès? The Cuban boy. This was in the days when Ollie Storn was finagling Mike Brown into the heavy sugar. So this fight was a fix, see, and Mike knew it was a fix, and the Kid knew it was a fix, and everybody knew it was a fix and that Kid Berès was supposed to lay down in the sixth round. Well, just the same Mike went out there and sloughed into the Kid and half-killed him—just for the hell of it. The Kid spent a month in the hospital, and when he came out he was only half a man." And Maguire smiled his crooked smile and pressed his horn gently at an old man crossing the street. Then as he started on, he said: "I guess I just don't like the champ."



"Speaking of fixes—" Ellery began.

"Were we?" asked Maguire almost too innocently.

"If it's on the level," predicted Mr. Queen gloomily, "Koyle will murder the champion. Wipe the ring up with him. That big fellow wants the title."

"Oh, sure."

"Hang it," persisted the Inspector, "who's going to win tonight?"

Maguire grinned. "Well, you know the odds: Three to one on the champ."

AS they drove into the parking lot across the street from the Stadium, Maguire grunted: "Speak of the devil!" He had backed the little roadster into a space beside a huge twelve-cylinder limousine the color of bright blood.

"Now, what's that supposed to mean?" asked Paula Paris.

"This red locomotive next to Lizzie?" Maguire chuckled. "It's the champ's. Or rather, it belongs to his manager, Ollie Storn. Ollie lets Mike use it. Mike's car's gone down the river."

"I thought the champion was wealthy," said Mr. Queen.

"Not any more. All tangled up in litigation. Dozens of judgments wrapped around his ugly ears."

"He ought to be hunk after tonight," said the Inspector wistfully. "Pulling down more than a half a million bucks for his end!"

"He won't collect a red cent of it," said the newspaper man. "His loving wife—you know Ivy, the ex-striptease doll with the curves and detours?—Ivy and Mike's creditors will grab it all off. Come on."

Mr. Queen assisted Miss Paris from the roadster and tossed his camel's-hair topcoat carelessly into the seat.

"Don't leave your coat there, Ellery," protested Paula. "Some one's sure to steal it."

Ellery shrugged.

"Let 'em! It's an old rag. Don't know what I brought it for, anyway, in this heat."

"Come on, come on," said Phil Maguire eagerly. . . .

From the press section at ringside the stands were one heaving mass of growling humanity. Two bantamweights were fencing in the ring.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Mr. Queen alertly.

"Crowd came out to see heavy artillery, not popguns," explained Maguire. "Take a look at the card."

"Six prelims," muttered Inspector Queen. "And all good boys, too. So what are these muggs beefing about?"

"Bantams, welters, lightweights, and one middleweight bout to wind up."



The champion lashed out feebly with his left glove.

"So what?" inquired Ellery of Maguire.

"So the card's too light. The fans came here to see the two big guys slaughter each other. They don't want to be annoyed by a bunch of gnats—even good gnats. . . . Hi, Happy!"

"Who's that?" asked Miss Paris curiously.

"Happy Day," the Inspector answered for Maguire. "Makes his living off bets. One of the biggest plungers in town."

Happy Day was visible a few rows off, an expensive Panama resting on a fold of neck-fat. He had a puffed face the color of cold rice pudding, and his eyes were like raisins. He nodded at Maguire and turned to watch the ring.

"Normally, Happy's face is like a raw steak," said Maguire. "He's worried about something."

"Perhaps," remarked Ellery Queen darkly, "the gentleman smells a mouse."

Maguire glanced at the great man sidewise, and then smiled. "And there's Mrs. Champ herself—Ivy Brown. Some stuff, hey, men?"

The woman undulated down the aisle on the arm of a weazened, wrinkled little man who chewed nervously on a long cigar. Ivy Brown was a full-blown female with a face like a Florentine cameo. The little man handed her into a seat, bowed elaborately, and hurried off.

"Isn't the little guy Ollie Storn, Brown's manager?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes," said Maguire. "Notice the act? Ivy and Mike Brown haven't lived together for a couple of years, and Ollie thinks it's lousy publicity. So he pays a lot of attention in public to the champ's wife. What d'ye think of her, Paula? The woman's angle is always refreshing."

"This may sound feline," murmured Miss Paris, "but she's an over-dressed harpie with the instincts of a she-wolf who never learned to apply make-up properly. Cheap—very cheap."

"Expensive—very expensive. Mike's wanted a divorce for a long time, but Ivy keeps rolling in the hay—and Mike's made plenty of hay in his time. Say, I gotta go to work."

Maguire bent over his typewriter.

The night deepened, the crowd rumbled, and Mr. Ellery Queen, the celebrated sleuth, felt uncomfortable. Specifically, his six-foot body was taut as a violin-string. It was a familiar but always menacing phenomenon. It meant that there was murder in the air.

THE challenger appeared first. He was met by a roar, like the roar of a river at flood-tide bursting its dam.

Miss Paris gasped with admiration. "Isn't he the one!"

Jim Koyle was indeed the one—an almost handsome giant six feet and a half tall, with preposterously broad shoulders, long smooth muscles, and a bronze skin. He rubbed his unshaven cheeks and grinned boyishly at the frantic fans.

His manager, Barney Hawks, followed him into the ring. Hawks too was big, but beside his fighter he appeared puny.

"Hercules in trunks," breathed Miss Paris. "Did you ever see such a body, Ellery!"

"The question more properly is," said Mr. Queen jealously, "can he keep that body off the floor? That's the question, my girl."

"Plenty fast for a big man," said Maguire. "Faster than you'd think, considering all that bulk. Maybe not as fast as Mike Brown, but Jim's got height and reach in his favor, and he's strong as a bull—the way Firpo was."

"Here comes the champ!" exclaimed Inspector Queen.

Another large man shuffled down the aisle and vaulted into the ring. His manager—the little wrinkled man—followed, still chewing the unlit cigar.

"Boo-oo-oo!"

"They're booing the champion!" cried Paula. "Phil, why?"

"Because they hate him," smiled Maguire. "They hate his insides because he's an ornery, brutal, crooked slob with the kick of a mule and the soul of a pretzel. That's why, darlin'."

Brown, however, paid no attention to the hostile crowd, or his taller, bigger, younger opponent. He seemed detached, indrawn, a sub-human fighting-machine.

WHEN the gong clamored for the start of the third round, the champion's left eye was a purple slit, his lips were cracked and bloody, and his hairy chest rose and fell in gasps. Thirty seconds later he was cornered, a beaten animal. They could see the ragged splotches over his kidneys, blooming above his trunks like crimson flowers.

Brown crouched, covering up, protecting his chin. Big Jim Koyle streaked forward. The giant's gloves sank into Brown's body. The champion fell forward and pinioned those long bronzed merciless arms.

The referee broke them; Brown grabbed Koyle again; they danced.

The crowd began singing "The Blue Danube," and the referee stepped between the two fighters again and spoke sharply to Brown.

"The dirty double-crosser!" said Phil Maguire.

"Who? What d'ye mean?" asked Inspector Queen, puzzled.

"Watch the pay-off."

The champion raised his battered face and lashed out feebly at Koyle with his soggy left glove. The giant laughed and stepped in.

The champion went down.

"Pretty as a picture," said Maguire admiringly.

At the count of nine, with the bay of the crowd in his battered ears, Mike Brown staggered to his feet. The bulk of Koyle slipped in, shadowy, and pumped twelve solid, lethal blows into Brown's body. The champion's knees broke. A whistling six-inch uppercut to the point of the jaw sent him toppling to the canvas.

This time he remained there.

"But he made it look kosher," drawled Maguire.

AS the crowd howled with glee and the satiation of blood-lust, Paula looked sickish. A few rows away Happy Day jumped up, stared wildly about, and then began shoving through the crowd.

"Happy isn't happy any more," sang Maguire.

The ring was verminous with police, handlers, officials. Jim Koyle was half-drowned in a wave of shouting people; he was laughing like a boy. In the champion's corner Ollie Storn worked slowly over the twitching torso of the unconscious man.

"Yes, sir," said Phil Maguire, rising and stretching, "that was as pretty a dive as I've seen, brother, and I've seen some beauts in my day."

"See here, Maguire," said Mr. Queen, nettled. "I have eyes, too. What makes you so cocksure Brown just tossed his title away?"

"You may be Einstein on Center Street," grinned Maguire, "but here, you're just another palooka, Mr. Queen."

"Seems to me," argued the Inspector in the bedlam, "Brown took an awful lot of punishment."

"Oh, sure," said Maguire mockingly. "Look, you boobs. Mike Brown has as sweet a right hand as the game has ever seen. Did you notice him use his right on Koyle tonight—even once?"

"Well," admitted Mr. Queen, "no."

"Of course not. Not a single blow. And he had a dozen openings, especially in the second round. And Jimmy Koyle still carries his guard too low. But what did Mike do? Put his deadly right into cold storage, kept jabbing away with that silly left of his—it couldn't put Paula away!—covering up, clinching, and taking one hell of a beating. . . . Sure, he made it look good. But your ex-champ took a dive just the same!"

Now they were helping Brown from the ring. He looked surly and tired. A small group followed him, laughing. Little Ollie Storn kept pushing people aside



"The long count," said the Inspector grimly. . . . "Here, help me turn him over."

fretfully. Mr. Queen spied Brown's wife, the richly curved Ivy, pale and furious, hurrying after them.

"Look," said Maguire. "I've got to see a man about a man, but I'll meet you folks in Koyle's dressing-room and we'll kick a few gongs around. Jim's promised to help a few of the boys warm up some hot spots."

"Oh, I'd love it!" cried Paula. "How do we get in, Phil?"

"What have you got a cop with you for? Show her, Inspector."

Maguire's slight figure slouched off. Ellery's scalp prickled suddenly. He frowned and took Paula's arm.

THE new champion's dressing-room was full of smoke, people, and noise. Young Koyle lay on a training-table like *Gulliver* in Lilliput, being rubbed down. He was answering questions good-humoredly, grinning at cameras, and flexing his shoulder-muscles. Barney Hawks was running about with his collar loosened, handing out cigars like a new father.

The crowd was so dense it overflowed into the adjoining shower-room. There were empty bottles on the floor and near the shower-room window five men, off in a corner, were shooting craps with enormous sobriety.

The Inspector spoke to Barney Hawks, and Koyle's manager introduced them to the champion, who took one look at Paula and said: "Hey, Barney, how about a little privacy?"

"Sure, sure. You're the champ now, Jimmy-boy!"

"Come on, you guys, you got enough pictures to last you a life-time. What did he say your name is, beautiful? Paris? That's a hell of a name."

"Isn't yours Couzzi?" asked Paula coolly.

"Socko," laughed the boy. "Come on, clear out, guys. This lady and I got some sparring to do. Hey, lay off the liniment, Louie. He didn't hardly touch me."

Koyle slipped from the rubbing-table, and Barney Hawks began shooing men out of the shower-room; finally Koyle



"I'll cripple you, you tinhorn!" yelled young Koyle.

grabbed some towels, winked at Paula, and went in, shutting the door. They heard the cheerful hiss of the shower.

FIVE minutes later Phil Maguire strolled in. He was perspiring. "Heil, Hitler," he shouted. "Where's the champ?"

"Here I am," said Koyle, opening the shower-room door and rubbing his bare chest with a towel. There was another towel draped around his loins. "Hya, Phil-boy. Be dressed in a shake. Say, this doll your Mamie? If she aint, I'm staking out my claim."

"Come on, come on, champ. We got a date with Fifty-second Street."

"Sure! How about you, Barney? You joining us?"

"Go ahead and play," said his manager in a fatherly tone. "Me, I got money business with the management." He fairly danced into the shower-room, emerged with a hat and a camel's-hair coat over his arm, kissed his hand affectionately at Koyle, and lumbered out.

"You're not going to stay in here while he dresses?" said Mr. Queen petulantly to Miss Paris. "Come on—you can wait for your hero in the hall."

"Yes, sir," said Paula submissively.

Koyle guffawed. "Don't worry, fella. I aint going to do you out of nothing. There's plenty of dames."

Mr. Queen piloted Miss Paris firmly from the room. "Let's meet them at the car," he said in a curt tone.

Miss Paris murmured: "Yes, sir."

They walked in silence to the end of the corridor and turned a corner into an alley which led out of the Stadium and into the street. As they walked down the alley Mr. Queen could see through the shower-room window into the dressing-room: Maguire had produced a bottle and he, Koyle, and the Inspector were raising glasses. Koyle in his athletic underwear was—well—

Mr. Queen hurried Miss Paris out of the alley and across the street to the parking lot. Cars were slowly driving out. But the big red limousine belonging to Ollie Storn still stood beside Maguire's roadster.

"Ellery," said Paula softly, "you're such a fool."

"Now Paula, I don't care to discuss—"

"What do you think I'm referring to? It's your topcoat, silly. Didn't I warn you someone would steal it?"

Mr. Queen glanced into the roadster. His coat was gone. "Oh, that! I was going to throw it away, anyway. Now look, Paula, if you think for one instant that I could be jealous of some oversized— Paula! What's the matter?"

Paula's cheeks were gray in the brilliant arc-light, and she was pointing a shaky forefinger at the big blood-red limousine.

"In—in there. . . . Isn't that—Mike Brown?"

Mr. Queen glanced quickly into the rear of the limousine. Then he said:



"Get into Maguire's car, Paula, and look the other way."

Paula crept into the roadster, shaking. Ellery opened the rear door of Storn's car.

Mike Brown tumbled out of the car to his feet, and lay still.

And after a moment the Inspector, Maguire, and Koyle strolled up, chuckling over something Maguire was relating in a thick voice.

Maguire stopped. "Say!" he blurted. "Who's that?"

Koyle said abruptly: "Isn't that Mike Brown?"

The Inspector said: "Out of the way, Jim." He knelt beside Ellery.

And Mr. Queen raised his head. "Yes, it's Mike Brown. Someone's used him for a pin-cushion."

Phil Maguire yelped and ran for a telephone. Paula Paris crawled out of Maguire's roadster and blundered after him, remembering her profession as a newspaper-woman.

"Is he—is he—" began Jim Koyle, gulping.

"The long count," said the Inspector grimly. "Say, is that girl gone? Here, help me turn him over."

They turned him over. He lay staring up into the blinding arc-light. He was completely dressed, and a gray tweed topcoat was wrapped about his body, still buttoned. He had been stabbed ten times in the abdomen and chest, through his topcoat. There had been a great

deal of bleeding; his coat was sticky and wet with it.

"Body's warm," said the Inspector. "This happened just a few minutes ago." He rose from the dust and stared unseeingly at the crowd which had gathered.

"Maybe," began the champion, licking his lips, "maybe—"

"Maybe what, Jim?" asked the Inspector, looking at him.

"Nothing, nothing."

"Why don't you go home? Don't let this spoil your night, kid."

Koyle set his jaw. "I'll stick around."

The Inspector blew a police whistle.

POLICE came, and Phil Maguire and Paula Paris returned; Ollie Storn and others appeared from across the street. The crowd thickened, and Mr. Ellery Queen crawled into the tonneau of Storn's car.

The rear of the red limousine was a shambles. Blood had stained the mohair cushions, and the floor-rug, which was wrinkled and scuffed. A large coat-button with a scrap of fabric still clinging to it lay on one of the cushions, beside a crumpled camel's-hair coat.

Mr. Queen seized the coat. The button had been torn from it. The front of the coat, like the front of the murdered man's coat, was badly bloodstained. But the stains had a pattern. Mr. Queen laid the coat on the seat, front up, and slipped the buttons through the button-holes. Then the bloodstains met. When

he unbuttoned the coat and separated the two sides of the garment, the stains separated, too, and on the side where the buttons were the blood traced a straight edge an inch outside the line of buttons.

The Inspector poked his head in. "What's that thing?"

"The murderer's coat."

"Let's see that!"

"It won't tell you anything about its wearer. Fairly cheap coat, label's been ripped out—no identifying marks. Do you see what must have happened in here, Dad?"

"What?"

"The murder occurred, of course, in this car. Either Brown and his killer got into the car simultaneously, or Brown was here first and then his murderer came, or the murderer was skulking in here, waiting for Brown to come. In any event, the murderer wore this coat."

"How do you know that?"

"Because there's every sign of a fierce struggle, so fierce Brown managed to tear off one of the coat-buttons of his assailant's coat. In the course of the struggle Brown was stabbed many times. His blood flowed freely. It got all over not only his own coat but the murderer's as well. From the position of the blood stains the murderer's coat must have been buttoned at the time of the struggle, which means he wore it."

The Inspector nodded. "Left it behind because he didn't want to be seen in a bloody coat. Ripped out all identifying marks."

FROM behind the Inspector came Paula's tremulous voice: "Could that be your camel's-hair coat, Ellery?"

Mr. Queen looked at her in an odd way. "No, Paula."

"What's this?" snapped the Inspector.

"Ellery left his topcoat behind in Phil's car before the fight," Paula explained. "I told him somebody would steal it, and somebody did. And now there's a camel's-hair coat—in this car."

"It isn't mine," said Mr. Queen patiently. "Mine has certain distinguishing characteristics which don't exist in this one—a cigarette burn at the second buttonhole, a hole in the right pocket."

The Inspector shrugged, went away.

"Then your coat's being stolen has nothing to do with it?" Paula shivered. "Ellery, I could use a cigarette."

Mr. Queen obliged. "On the contrary. The theft of my coat has everything to do with it."

"But I don't understand. You just said—"

Mr. Queen held a match to Miss Paris' cigarette and stared intently at the body of Mike Brown.

STORN'S chauffeur, a tough-looking customer, twisted his cap and said: "Mike tells me after the fight he won't need me. Tells me he'll pick me up on the Grand Concourse. Said he'd drive himself."

"Yes?"

"I was kind of—curious. I had a hot dog at the stand there and I—watched. I seen Mike come over and climb into the back—"

"Was he alone?" demanded the Inspector.

"Yeah. Just got in and sat there. A couple of drunks come along then and I couldn't see good. Only seemed to me somebody else come over and got into the car after Mike."

"Who? Who was it? Did you see?"

The chauffeur shook his head. "I couldn't see good. I don't know. After a while I thought 'it aint my business,' so I walks away. But when I heard police sirens I come back."

"The one who came after Mike Brown got in," said Mr. Queen with a certain eagerness, "that person was wearing a coat, eh?"

"I guess so. Yeah."

"You didn't witness anything else that occurred?" persisted Mr. Queen.

"Nope."

"Doesn't matter, really," muttered the great man. "Line's clear. Clear as the sun. Must be that—"

"What are you mumbling about?" demanded Miss Paris in his ear.

Mr. Queen started. "Was I mumbling?" He shook his head.

Then a man from Headquarters came up with a dudish little fellow with frightened eyes, who babbled that he didn't know nothing at all, he didn't know nothing; and the Inspector said: "Come on, Oetjens. You were heard shooting off your mouth in that gin-mill. What's the dope?"

And the little fellow said shrilly: "I don't want no trouble, no trouble. I only said—"

"Yes?"

"Mike Brown looked me up this morning," muttered Oetjens, "and he says to me, he says, 'Hymie,' he says, 'Happy Day knows you, Happy Day takes a lot of your bets,' he says, 'so go lay fifty

grand with Happy on Koyle to win by a K.O.," Mike says. "You lay that fifty grand for *me*, get it?" he says. And he says, "If you shoot your trap off to Happy or anyone else that you bet fifty grand for me on Koyle," he says, "I'll rip your heart out and break your hands and give you the thumb," he says, and a lot more, so I laid the fifty grand on Koyle to win by a K.O. and Happy took the bet at twelve to five, he wouldn't give no more."

Jim Koyle growled: "I'll break your neck, damn you!"

"Wait a minute, Jim—"

"He's saying Brown took a dive!" cried the champion. "I licked Brown fair and square. I beat the hell out of him fair and square!"

"You thought you beat the hell out of him fair and square," muttered Phil Maguire. "But he took a dive, Jim. Didn't I tell you, Inspector? Laying off that right of his—"

"It's a lie! Where's my manager? Where's Barney? They aint going to hold up the purse on this fight!" roared Koyle. "I won the title fair!"

"TAKE it easy, Jim," said the Inspector. "Everybody knows you were in there leveling tonight. Look here, Hymie, did Brown give you the cash to bet for him?"

"He was busted." Oetjens cringed. "I just laid the bet on the cuff. The pay-off don't come till the next day. So I knew it was okay, because with Mike himself betting on Koyle the fight was in the bag—"

"I'll cripple you, you tinhorn!" yelled young Koyle.

"Take it easy, Jim," soothed Inspector Queen. "So you laid the fifty grand on the cuff, Hymie, and Happy covered the bet at twelve to five, and you knew it would come out all right because Mike was going to take a dive, and then you'd collect a hundred and twenty thousand dollars and give it to Mike, is that it?"

"Yeah, yeah. But that's all, I swear—"

"When did you see Happy last, Hymie?" Inspector Queen asked.

Oetjens looked scared and began to back away. His police escort had to shake him a little. But he shook his head stubbornly.

"Now it couldn't be," asked the Inspector softly, "that somehow Happy got wind that you'd laid that fifty grand, not for yourself, but for Mike Brown, could it? It couldn't be that Happy

found out it was a dive, or suspected it?" The Inspector said sharply to a detective: "Find Happy Day."

"I'm right here," said a bass voice from the crowd; and the fat gambler waded through and said hotly to Inspector Queen: "So I'm the sucker, hey? I'm supposed to take the rap, hey?"

"Did you know Mike Brown was set to take a dive?"

"No!"

Phil Maguire chuckled.

And little Ollie Storn, pale as his dead fighter, shouted: "Happy done it, Inspector! He found out, and he waited till after the fight, and when he saw Mike laying down he came out here and gave him the business! That's the way it was!"

"You lousy rat," said the gambler. "How do I know you didn't do it yourself? He wasn't taking no dive you couldn't find out about! Maybe you stuck him up because of that fancy doll of his. Don't tell *me*. I know all about you and that Ivy broad. I know—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the Inspector with a satisfied smile; then there was a shriek and Ivy Brown elbowed her way through the jam to fling herself on the dead body of her husband for the benefit of the press.

And as the photographers joyously went to work, and Happy Day and Ollie Storn eyed each other with hate, and the crowd milled around, the Inspector said happily to his son: "Not too tough. A wrap-up. It's Happy Day, all right, and all I've got to do is find—"

The great man smiled and said: "You're riding a dead nag."

"Eh?"

"You're wasting your time."

The Inspector ceased to look happy. "What am I supposed to be doing, then? You tell me. You know it all."

"Of course I do, and of course I shall," said Mr. Queen. "What are you to do? Find my coat."

"Say, what *is* this about your damn' coat?" growled the Inspector.

"Find my coat, and perhaps I'll find your murderer."

IT was a peculiar sort of case. First there had been the ride to the Stadium, and the conversation about how Phil Maguire didn't like Mike Brown, and then there was the ringside gossip, the preliminaries, the main event, the champion's knockout, and the rest of it—all

unimportant, all stodgy little details—until Mr. Queen and Miss Paris strolled across the parking lot and found two things—or rather, lost one thing—Mr. Queen's coat—and found another—Mike Brown's body; and so there was an important murder-case, all nice and shiny.

And immediately the great man began nosing about and muttering about his coat, as if an old and shabby topcoat being stolen could possibly be more important than Mike Brown lying there in the gravel of the parking space full of punctures, like an abandoned tire, and Mike's wife, full of more curves and detours than the Storm King highway, sobbing on his chest and calling upon heaven and the New York press to witness how dearly she'd loved the poor dead gorillá.

So it appeared that Mike Brown had had a secret rendezvous with someone after the fight, because he had got rid of Ollie Storn's chauffeur, and the appointment must have been for the interior of Ollie Storn's red limousine. And whoever he was, he came, and got in with Mike, and there was a struggle, and he stabbed Mike almost a dozen times with something long and sharp, and then fled, leaving his camel's-hair coat behind, because with blood all over its front it would have given him away.

That brought up the matter of the weapon, and everybody began nosing about, including Mr. Queen, because it was a cinch the murderer might have dropped it in his flight. And, sure enough, a radio-car man found it in the dirt under a parked car—a long, evil-looking stiletto with no distinguishing marks whatever and no fingerprints except the fingerprints of the radio-car man. But Mr. Queen persisted in nosing even after that discovery, and finally the Inspector asked him peevishly: "What are you looking for now?"

"My coat," explained Mr. Queen. "Do you see anyone with my coat?"

But there was hardly a man in the crowd with a coat. It was a warm night.

Finally Mr. Queen gave up his queer search and said: "I don't know what you good people are going to do, but, as for me, I'm going back to the Stadium."

"For heaven's sake, what for?" cried Paula.

"To see if I can find my coat," said Mr. Queen patiently.

"I told you you should have taken it with you!"



"Oh, no," said Mr. Queen. "I'm glad I didn't. I'm glad I left it behind in Maguire's car. I'm glad it was stolen."

"But why, you exasperating idiot?"

"Because now," replied Mr. Queen with a cryptic smile, "I have to go looking for it."

AND while the morgue wagon carted Mike Brown's body off, Mr. Queen trudged back across the dusty parking lot and into the alley which led to the Stadium dressing-rooms. And the Inspector herded everyone—with special attention for Mr. Happy Day—after his son. He didn't know what else to do.

Then finally they were assembled in Jim Koyle's dressing-room, and Ivy was weeping into more cameras, and Mr. Queen was glumly contemplating Miss Paris' hat, when there was a noise at the door and they saw Barney Hawks, the new champion's manager, standing on the threshold in the company of several officials and promoters.

"What ho," said Barney Hawks with a puzzled glance about. "You still here, champ? What goes on?"

"Plenty goes on," said the champ savagely. "Barney, did you know Brown took a dive tonight?"

"What? What's this?" said Barney Hawks, looking around virtuously. "Who



Ivy Brown was calling upon heaven and the New York press to witness how dearly she'd loved the poor gorilla.

says so, the dirty liar? My boy won that title on the up and up, gentlemen! He beat Brown fair and square."

"Brown threw the fight?" asked one of the men with Hawks, a member of the Boxing Commission. "Is there any evidence of that?"

"The hell with that," said the Inspector politely. "Barney, Mike Brown is dead."

Hawks began to laugh, then he stopped laughing and sputtered: "What's this? What's the gageroo? Brown dead?"

Jim Koyle waved a huge paw tiredly. "Somebody bumped him off tonight, Barney. In Storn's car across the street."

"Well, I'm a bum, I'm a bum," breathed his manager, staring. "So Mike got his, hey? Well, well. Tough. Loses his title and his life. Who done it, boys?"

"Maybe you didn't know my boy was dead!" shrilled Ollie Storn. "Yeah, you put on a swell act, Barney! Maybe you fixed it with Mike so he'd take a dive so your boy could win the title! Maybe you—"

"There's been another crime committed here tonight," said a mild voice, and they all looked wonderingly around to find Mr. Ellery Queen advancing toward Mr. Hawks.

"Hey?" said Koyle's manager, staring stupidly at him.

"My coat was stolen."

"Hey?" Hawks kept gaping.

"And, unless my eyes deceive me, as the phrase goes," continued the great man, stopping before Barney Hawks, "I've found it again."

"Hey?"

"On your arm." And Mr. Queen gently removed from Mr. Hawks' arm a camel's-hair topcoat, and unfolded it, and examined it. "Yes. My very own."

BARNEY HAWKS turned green, in the silence.

Something sharpened in Mr. Queen's keen eyes, and he bent over the camel's-hair coat again. He spread out the sleeves and examined the armhole seams. They had burst, as had the seam at the back of the coat. He looked up and at Mr. Hawks reproachfully.

"The least you might have done," he said, "is to have returned my property in the same condition in which I left it."

"Your coat?" said Barney Hawks damply. Then he shouted: "What the hell is this? That's my coat! My camel's-hair coat!"

"No," Mr. Queen dissented respectfully, "I can prove this to be mine. You see, it has a telltale cigarette burn at the second buttonhole, and a hole in the right-hand pocket."

"But—I found it where I left it! It was here all the time! I took it out of here after the fight and went up to the office to talk to these gentlemen and I've been—" The manager stopped, and his complexion faded from green to white.

"Then where's my coat?" he asked slowly.

"Will you try this on?" asked Mr. Queen with the deference of a clothing salesman, and he took from a detective the bloodstained coat they had found abandoned in Ollie Storn's car.

Mr. Queen held the coat up before Hawks; and Hawks said thickly: "All right. It's my coat. I guess it's my coat, if you say so. So what?"

"So," replied Mr. Queen, "some one knew Mike Brown was broke, that he owed his shirt, that not even his lion's share of the purse tonight would suffice to pay his debts. Some one persuaded Mike Brown to throw the fight tonight, offering to pay him a large sum of money, I suppose, for taking the dive. That money no one would know about—that money would not have to be turned over to the clutches of Mike Brown's loving wife and creditors. That money would be Mike Brown's own. So Mike Brown said yes, realizing that he could make more money, too, by placing a large bet with Happy Day through the medium of Mr. Oetjens. And with this double nest-egg he could jeer at the unfriendly world.

"And probably Brown and his tempter conspired to meet in Storn's car immediately after the fight for the pay-off, for Brown would be insistent about that. So Brown sent the chauffeur away, and sat in the car, and the tempter came to keep the appointment—armed not with the pay-off money, but a sharp stiletto. And by using the stiletto he saved himself a tidy sum—the sum he'd promised Brown—and also made sure Mike Brown would never be able to tell the wicked story to the wicked world."

BARNEY HAWKS licked dry lips. "Don't look at me, Mister. You got nothing on Barney Hawks. I don't know nothing about this."

And Mr. Queen said, paying no attention whatever to Mr. Hawks: "A pretty problem, friends. You see, the tempter came to the scene of the crime in a camel's-hair coat, and he had to leave the coat behind because it was bloodstained and would have given him away. Also, in the car next to the murder-car lay, quite defenseless, my own poor camel's-hair

coat, its only virtue the fact that it was stained with no man's blood.

"We found a coat abandoned in Storn's car and my coat, in the next car, stolen. Coincidence? Hardly. The murderer certainly took my coat to replace the coat he was forced to leave behind."

MR. QUEEN paused to refresh himself with a cigarette, glancing at Miss Paris, who was staring at him with a soul-satisfying worship. Mind over matter, thought Mr. Queen, remembering with special satisfaction how Miss Paris had stared at Jim Koyle's muscles.

"Well?" said Inspector Queen. "Suppose this bird did take your coat? What of it?"

"But that's exactly the point," Mr. Queen mourned. "Why?"

"Why?" echoed the Inspector blankly.

"Yes, why? Everything in this world is activated by a reason. Why did he take my coat?"

"Well, I—I suppose to wear it."

"Precisely," applauded Mr. Queen. "If he took it he had a reason, and since its only function under the circumstances could have been its wearability, so to speak, he took it to wear it." He paused. "But why should he want to wear it?"

The Inspector looked angry. "See here, Ellery—" he began.

"No, Dad," said Mr. Queen gently. "I'm talking with a purpose. There's a point. *The* point. You might say he had to wear it because he'd got blood on his suit *under* the coat and required a coat to hide the bloodstained suit."

"Well, sure," said Phil Maguire eagerly. "That's it."

"You may be an Einstein in your sports department, Mr. Maguire, but here you are just a palooka. . . . No," said Mr. Queen, shaking his head sadly, "that's not it. He couldn't possibly have got blood on his suit. The coat shows that at the time he attacked Brown he was wearing it *buttoned*. If the topcoat was buttoned, his suit didn't catch any of the blood."

"He certainly didn't need a coat because of the weather," muttered Inspector Queen.

"True. It's been warm all evening. You see," smiled Mr. Queen, "what a cute little thing it is. He'd left his own coat behind, its labels and other identifying marks taken out, unworried about its being found—otherwise he would have hidden it or thrown it away. Such being the case, you would say he'd simply make his escape in the clothes he was wearing

beneath the coat. But he didn't. He stole another coat, my coat, for his escape." Mr. Queen coughed gently. "So surely it's obvious that if he stole my coat for his escape, he *needed* my coat for his escape? That if he escaped without my coat he would be *noticed*?"

"I don't get it," said the Inspector. "He'd be noticed? But if he was wearing ordinary clothing—"

"Then obviously he wouldn't need my coat," nodded Mr. Queen.

"Or—say! If he was wearing a uniform of some kind—say he was a Stadium attendant—"

"Then still obviously he wouldn't need my coat. A uniform would be a perfect guarantee that he'd pass in the crowds unnoticed." Mr. Queen shook his head. "No, there's only one answer to this problem. And that answer must be: If the murderer had been wearing clothes—*any* normal body-covering—beneath the bloodstained coat, he could have made his escape in those clothes. But since he didn't, it can only mean that he *wasn't* wearing clothes, you see, and that's why he needed a coat not only to come to the scene of the crime, but to escape from it as well."

There was another silence, and finally Paula said: "Wasn't wearing clothes? A naked man? Why, that's like something out of Poe!"

"NO," smiled Mr. Queen, "merely something out of the Stadium. You see, we had a classification of gentlemen in the vicinity tonight who wore no—or nearly no—clothing. In a word, the gladiators. Or, if you choose, the pugilists. . . Wait!" he said swiftly. "This is an extraordinary case, chiefly because I solved the hardest part of it almost the instant I knew there was a murder. For the instant I discovered that Brown had been stabbed, and that my coat had been stolen by a murderer who left his own coat behind, I knew that the murderer could have been *only one of thirteen men*—the thirteen living prizefighters left after Brown was killed. For you'll recall there were fourteen fighters in the Stadium tonight—twelve distributed among six preliminary bouts, and two in the main bout.

"Which of the thirteen living fighters had killed Brown? That was my problem from the beginning. And so I had to find my coat, because it was the only concrete connection I could discern be-

tween the murderer and his crime. And now I've found my coat, and now I know which of the thirteen murdered Brown."

Barney Hawks' jaws were agape.

"I'm a tall, fairly broad man. In fact, I'm six feet tall," said the great man. "And yet the murderer, in wearing my coat to make his escape, burst its seams at the armholes and back! That meant he was a big man, a much bigger man than I, much bigger and broader.

"Which of the thirteen fighters on the card tonight were bigger and broader than I? Ah, but it's been a very light card—only bantamweights, welterweights, lightweights, middleweights! Therefore none of the twelve preliminary fighters could have murdered Brown. Therefore only one fighter was left—a man six and a half feet tall, extremely broad-shouldered and broad-backed, a man who had the greatest motive to induce Mike Brown to throw the fight tonight!"

AND this time the silence was ghastly with meaning. It was broken by Jim Koyle's lazy laugh. "If you mean me, you must be off your nut. Why, I was in that shower-room taking a shower at the time Mike was bumped off!"

"Yes, I mean you, Mr. Jim Koyle Stiletto-wielding Couzzi," said Mr. Queen clearly, "and the shower-room was the cleverest part of your scheme. You went into the shower-room in full view of all of us, with towels, shut the door, turned on the shower, slipped a pair of trousers over your bare and manly legs, grabbed Barney Hawks' camel's-hair coat and hat which were hanging on a peg in there, and then ducked out the shower-room window into the alley. From there it was a matter of seconds to the street and the parking lot across the street. Of course, when you stained Hawks' coat during the commission of your crime, you couldn't risk coming back in it. And you had to have a coat—a buttoned coat—to cover your nakedness for the return trip. So you stole mine, for which I'm very grateful, because otherwise—Grab him, will you? My right isn't very good," said Mr. Queen, employing an adroit and dainty bit of footwork to escape Koyle's sudden homicidal lunge in his direction.

And as Koyle went down under an avalanche of flailing arms and legs, Mr. Queen murmured apologetically to Miss Paris: "After all, darling, he *is* the heavyweight champion of the world."

Mr. Queen enjoys football and other sports also; but his flair for crime problems gets him into more hectic excitements—as witness his next story (in an early issue).

The First

As this spirited story attests, the siege of Paris in 1870 developed the first air mail.

By
**MICHAEL
GALLISTER**

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



The news is officially confirmed that the barbarous Prussians have decreed the death of a spy to any mail pilot or aeronaut who may fall into their hands.

—*Gazette de Paris*, November, 1870

CHOTEAU, the American, handed over the *Gazette*.

"See that notice, Rolier?"

"Old stuff," averred Rolier. "We've heard that already. And what's more, Bismarck now has special guns from the Krupp works to bring us down."

"And you don't turn a hair!" said the American. He leaned forward, admiringly. "My friend, you fellows amaze me! Nobody in your entire corps knows anything about balloons; you've volunteered from all branches—you, for instance, from the engineers. And the first time you ever go in the air, up you go with the mail, and off and away, live or die!"

Rolier merely smiled, puffed at his cigarette, and sipped his wine. He did not, as yet, suspect anything.

It was November of 1870, with Paris under such close siege that it could only

communicate with France by balloons. These took out the mail, but no mail could get in. A regular government air-mail service had been established. Few of the pilots had ever been in the air, and most were common seamen who could not even read a barometer. Paul Rolier, who was from the engineers, was different, however.

"You fellows had balloons, in your Civil War in America," he said lazily.

"True, but I wasn't with the Yankees," Choteau responded.

Choteau was from New Orleans, had come to Paris after the Civil War, and was in some sort of business, no one knew what. When the siege began, he made friends with the military and in this way had met Rolier.

The two of them sat, that November evening, in the Café Miromontail, piling up drink saucers and discussing the air mail. Outside, the night was bitter cold. By the door of the café, on the street, was a fuzzy old chestnut-vendor, with his charcoal brazier and his big fat chestnuts for roasting. Starvation, as yet, had not bitten deeply into wretched Paris.

"No, you balloon chaps are just in bad luck," said Choteau. "All the skilled aeronauts were used up at the start, all the good balloons, all the instruments. Now you're struggling along as best you can. It's not scientific."

Paul Rolier laughed. "I'm no scientist, Choteau. But I've brains enough to know that science leads to results, rather than achieves them."

Air Mail

"I don't understand," murmured Choteau, but the other merely shrugged.

"France, my friend, isn't scientific, either, like the Prussians; but she endures."

Choteau sighed. "Well, it's sad news you have given me tonight; I'll miss you. Assigned to the next balloon, are you?"

Rolier nodded. Choteau produced more cigarettes, called for another drink. He was affable, heavy-chinned, shrewd of eye, with heavy brown mustache and thinly masterful lips. A man, reflected Rolier, who might well be without either fear or scruples in whatever he undertook. And, by his own admission, Jim Choteau was quite a soldier of fortune.

"When," he went on carelessly, "will the next balloon go out? Tomorrow?"

"The meteorologists say no," Rolier replied, sipping his vermouth. "There may be good weather conditions next day, however. Two balloons are ready; Fonvielle, the aeronaut, is at the Vaugirard gasworks with his own balloon and several passengers, awaiting a fair wind. I understand that I'm to take up one from the Gare du Nord workshop of Dartois."

"He builds good ones," Choteau commented sagely. "Air-mail contracts, eh? That means you'll be taking out the mails day after tomorrow. Any passengers?"

The other shrugged. "One, probably. I'm taking Leon Bezier, the guerrilla leader; he'll be of more use fighting the Prussians outside than in Paris."

"I've heard of him. Do you know him personally?"

Rolier dissented, laughing. A private in the engineers, know one of the guerrilla leaders? Not likely. They would meet when the balloon went up, not before.

"It seems to me that I'd be worried, if I were in your shoes," said Choteau with a confidential air. "If you're captured, a spy's death; success depends wholly on the wind, and above all, the special guns Krupp has made for the Prussians."

"Well, nobody dies twice!" said Rolier cheerfully. "Besides, the mail goes out at night, now, to lessen the risk from Prussian guns. Why worry? Life's uncertain anyhow. The most real danger is from spies here in Paris, who might

tamper with the balloons or let the Prussians know the hour of departure."

"Bah! You people are hysterical on the subject of spies." Choteau made a scornful gesture. A heavy ring on his finger caught the eye of Rolier; it was made from a horse-shoe nail, heavily gold-plated. Some relic of the Civil War in America, Choteau had once said. "I was in the spy service at home, five years ago; it was different there, where both sides had similar people and spoke the same language. Here, you'd catch a Prussian in no time. You've caught a few already, and good riddance! By the way, I hear you'll be taking out some important mail."

"News to me," said Rolier carelessly, and a trifle cynically. "Did you read it in the papers?"

Choteau chuckled. "No. Rampont told me yesterday. It seems you'll have government dispatches. A secret, of course; don't mention it. I was at Rampont's office and he mentioned it in passing. No harm in telling you; this is a project for getting mail into Paris, and a sure thing. Vitally important, too, and to both sides. When nothing can get in except pigeons, think what it'd mean if letters came through!"

ROLIER nodded mechanically, but was secretly puzzled. For two days Rampont, head of the postal administration, had been confined to his house with a severe cold—as Rolier happened to know.

The mail situation was, indeed, of vital importance. Paris was tightly invested; the Prussians were savagely trying to break the French morale—that of France, by lack of news from Paris, that of Paris by lack of news from France. The air mail had set their plans at naught, for the balloons took out pigeons which returned with microscopic dispatches. If letters could get in as well, the morale of Paris would be invulnerable. So the Prussians were exerting every energy to check and destroy this air-mail service.

Presently Choteau rose, paid the score, shook hands with Rolier, and departed.

Rolier lingered. By sheer chance, his gaze followed the American. He saw Choteau, outside the entrance, pause by the brazier of the vendor of roast chestnuts. He saw the two talk for a moment. Choteau bought some of the chestnuts; and, as he paid for them, gave the vendor a coin—and apparently something else as well.

Rolier could have sworn that an envelope, a paper of some kind, changed hands. He noted this only subconsciously, at the moment. Then Choteau was gone down the snowy street.

Over a final drink, Rolier sat puzzling out the question. Choteau was a good fellow, an interesting, affable fellow, and was on the inside of things; he had hinted now and then about war contracts, about occupying a berth in the balloon section of the administration. He knew the people at the top. And it was no secret that many of the Americans caught in Paris by the Prussian siege were giving the government valuable assistance.

How, then, had Choteau been talking yesterday to Rampont, in the latter's office, when Rampont had been in bed with a cold? A slip of the tongue, no doubt. Rolier shrugged and paid and departed. Outside, he noted casually that the chestnut vendor was gone.

Only that night in barracks, as he waited for sleep, did other things recur to him. Choteau had been in the spy service during the Civil War, eh? And the talk with the chestnut man, the envelope passed over; also, the astonishing fund of knowledge possessed by Choteau, about the air mail and the Government's plans!

Suddenly Rolier began to go hot and cold as he lay there, as he recalled with what negligent frankness he himself had talked to Choteau. Suppose the man were a spy, or an enemy agent? Nonsense; the very idea was absurd! None the less, it persisted until he fell asleep.

WHEN he wakened, the idea was still there. He would, he told himself, settle it one way or the other. Easily enough done. Today, however, happened to be the twenty-fourth of November, a date of some note in the annals of the first air mail.

Rolier's earliest intimation of this came with a curt order to report instantly to the commander of pilots at the Gare du Nord. When he got there he found the place, always in a bustle, now pervaded by increased activity and filled

with rumors. The wind had changed, snow was in the air, storm threatened, but for the air mail it was first-class; the wind was toward the west and north, which meant that balloons would be carried over the enemy lines.

The vast station-shed, now empty of all rolling stock, was humming. At immensely long tables women were sewing on balloon materials; from the high rafters hung balloon bags in every stage of construction; some, inflated, were being varnished. Over at one side the wicker baskets were being woven by seamen, a detachment of Marines having been turned over to the air-mail service, acting both as workmen and as pilots.

ROLIER found his commandant in the corner where lay the training-school for pilots—being merely a balloon basket suspended from the rafters, where the men were given quick training in the very elementary processes of landing and taking off.

"Rolier!" came the barked command. "Report immediately to M. Hervé in his office; from there, to M. Rampont at headquarters. You're leaving sometime today."

Hervé was the meteorologist who had technical charge of all air-mail flights. Rolier went to his office, was waved to a chair, and the other spoke briskly.

"You're aware of the change of wind? Good. Fonvielle's balloon is leaving from Vaugirard this morning—has already left, since it's past ten o'clock. You'll leave tonight; M. Rampont will give you full instructions. Now, my friend, this happens to be a flight of great importance. Besides the usual instruments, I'm providing you with two barometers; I understand you're acquainted with instruments."

"To a certain extent," assented Rolier cautiously.

The scientist took him into the next room and showed him the bulkily made instruments, with obvious pride.

"This aneroid is not entirely accurate; but, as you can comprehend, it is difficult for us to provide any instruments at all. Here is one of the new mercurial barometers, specially constructed for us by Fortin. It's a thing of beautiful precision, but unluckily very delicate; if any accident shatters the tube, the mercury is lost and your instrument ruined. So I've provided the aneroid as a reserve barometer, since it's essential that you should know your height."

Behind all this, as Rolier perceived, was a great deal left unsaid. The first balloons to leave Paris had been prodigal of instruments. Now that the siege was two months along, there were simply no more to be had at any price. That the government should supply him with two of the precious things was eloquent testimony to the enormous importance placed on his flight.

He smiled, however, as he regarded the two instruments. The mercurial had a beautiful scale, plainly marked and easily read. The old aneroid, on the contrary, had a scale that looked like hen tracks.

"Russian?" he asked—and the meteorologist nodded.

"Yes. Ah! I forgot. I meant to mark out a new scale—this is an old Russian instrument we picked up somewhere. You cannot read these figures."

"Don't trouble," said Rolier. "Tell me what they are, and I'll need to know nothing more. The scale would be much less legible if you tampered with it. Go over the figures once, and I'll have them in mind. I'll probably not need the aneroid anyway."

So it was done, and Rolier had no trouble mastering the queer figures.

HE set off for Rampont's office at the central Bureau de Postes. *En route* there, the worry of the night recurred to him; it had been driven out of his head by intervening matters. It was momentarily driven away once more, for in Rampont's office he was introduced to a sturdy, heavily bearded, taciturn man clad in rough woolen garments—the guerrilla leader, Leon Bezier, who was to be his passenger. After a handclasp and greeting Bezier departed, and Rampont took the pilot into his private office and closed the door.

"Now, *mon ami*," he said cheerfully, "you're leaving tonight; be ready at eleven-thirty, for the wind promises to hold good. It may even rise into storm. You'll have only the one passenger, and not more than two hundred and fifty kilos of mail, in four sacks."

Rolier's brows lifted slightly.

"Only four hundred and fifty pounds, M. Rampont?"

"Precisely. One large pouch of general mail, comprising half the load; one of correspondence for abroad, two others of Government correspondence. These two are of supreme importance. At any cost, they must not fall into Prussian hands, nor must they be lost."



"After all, it was necessity," said Rolier.

"Ah! I know," exclaimed Rolier. "The new project for getting mail into Paris."

"*Diab!e!*" The official stared at him in utter stupefaction. "You know? You know what is known to only five men—the most closely guarded secret in Paris? You know—and a word, a breath, reaching the Prussians—"

"You yourself mentioned it to M. Choteau day before yesterday, or sometime," broke in Rolier, in sudden recollection. "He spoke to me about it last evening."

"I've mentioned it to no one!" exclaimed Rampont excitedly. "No one! Who's this man Choteau? Thunders of heaven! To find the cherished secrets of the administration casually known to outsiders! Who's this man?"

"Precisely what I was about to ask you, M. Rampont," said the pilot. "Look! Let me tell you my suspicions."

He poured out everything, and Rampont mopped his brow, as well he might. True, Choteau apparently had known none of the details of this secret, so carefully designed to set at naught all Prussian ingenuity; but that he even knew about the plans under way, was enough to make France sweat.

When Rolier had finished, the official sat in reflective thought, then roused.

"My dear Rolier," he said quietly, "you have rendered us an inestimable service. You know the vital importance attached to opening of communication between France and Paris. You know how the Prussians have cut us off completely—even to the secret telegraph wires coming down the Seine. You know why the Government dispatches you'll carry tonight will mean so much, both to us and to the Prussians; why their capture or their destruction would be a Prussian victory. Your balloon will be brought down, if Prussia can bring it down. . . . At all costs, this mail must go through."

"It will go through, monsieur, at all costs," said Rolier.

"Good. Now give me any information you can about this Choteau."

Rolier could give very little, however, and soon departed. The latest balloon Dartois had made was to be his; it had been named the *Ville d'Orleans*.

SOON after eleven that night, a cold and bitter night with icy wind whining through the streets, he came to the Gare du Nord. Every approach was heavily guarded, his papers were de-

manded at every turn; nothing was taken for granted, not a cat could get into these precincts unseen.

Rolier was taken in charge by Hervé, who had news for him.

"Fonvielle left at ten this morning," said the meteorologist. "At my request, he took two pigeons, releasing them with information to serve us. One has come in. He landed at Louvain, in Belgium, at two-fifteen this afternoon, reporting steady currents from the southeast, up to one thousand meters. Above that height is wind in the same direction, but of great velocity, with a trend toward the north. As the wind here has been increasing in velocity, you'd best watch things carefully. If you don't go above a thousand, I'd say that two hours will see you in safety; but you'd best clear the Prussian lines at a good height. Luckily, the sky is clouded; they'll hardly discern you."

RAMPONT showed up a little later and drew Rolier aside.

"Your suspicions were right," he said. "We've caught that chestnut vendor—a poor devil of a Bulgarian, employed to carry messages. He talked, on promise of life, and tonight a nest of Prussians in the Rue du Bac was taken in: all spies."

"My American?"

"We've not found him. The Prussians won't talk. The Bulgar knows Choteau and says he's a spy by necessity, that the Prussians have some hold on him and forced him to the job. That won't save his neck when we catch him! It's now eleven-thirty. Flight's postponed for ten minutes, awaiting final government dispatches. Here's a tray for you."

Food, wine, coffee; Rolier made a hurried but excellent meal. Then out to the waiting balloon, beyond the train-sheds; a huge, ghostly white shape bulging in air, seamen waiting at the lines, soldiers on guard everywhere.

Rolier got into the basket, which had loose boards for a floor. Everything was in shape; instruments, a cage of carrier pigeons fastened to the ring above the nacelle, ballast, a dark-lantern, lighted and hooded. With rattle of wheels and a clang of horses' hoofs, a mailcart arrived and the sacks went in. One big one, three smaller ones. The two smallest were most important. All was ready—then some one realized the passenger had not come.

A shout went up. Excited voices rose high. "Bezier! *Vive Bezier!*" He was coming now, papers in hand, rushed along

by two guards—a sturdy bearded figure, heavily wrapped with muffler about the face, and cap pulled down. He gasped something and climbed into the basket.

"Ready!" said Rolier. "Cast off everything. *Viva la France!*"

Voices chorused response. Then the gas-flares, the faces, the voices, were all gone. Without a sound, without motion, the earth had suddenly fallen away.

Rolier leaned over the edge, watching the flitting lights below, lights of Paris, lights of jetting batteries, lights of the Prussian lines. Below and far. He turned, and cursed under his breath; a hump in the wicker floor made the boards fly up if one stepped on the wrong spot. He saw Bezier clinging to the edge and looking down.

"I must watch the altitude," he said, and opened the dark-lantern. The guarded ray touched the mercurial indicator; twelve hundred. Then it touched something else—the hand of Bezier, gripping the rail. The hand wore a horse-shoe nail made into a ring, heavily plated with gold. Rolier switched off the light.

"Twelve hundred!" exclaimed Bezier in a growl. "Good! Don't go higher."

The voice did not deceive Rolier; instead, it verified his incredible suspicion.

"Is that an order, M. Choteau?" he asked.

"The devil!" The dark shape moved, twisted around indistinctly. Choteau no longer disguised his voice. "You, Rolier! Know me, do you?"

"Yes. Where's Bezier?"

"Tied up." Choteau laughed harshly. "Careful, now! I'll shoot you if you start anything!"

"Then you'd be extremely foolish," Rolier said calmly. "I've no weapon, and without me you'd not get to earth again."

"Bah! I can read a barometer as well as you," spat the American. "I've only to put a bullet through the gas-bag to bring us down gently, and pull the rip-cord when we're close to earth. Stay over there where you are. Put down that dark-lantern on the floor between us, and get back to your side of the car. I heard tonight that you'd tipped off the *flics*—and I moved fast."

"Obviously," said Rolier. His brain was moving fast, also, as he set the dimly glowing lantern on the floorboards and stepped back. "You got after Bezier, took his papers, donned false whiskers—and got away. And now you intend to murder me."

"I don't, you fool," said the other, stooping for the lantern. "I don't want to hurt you; I like you. But it's the fortunes of war. Give me your parole to accept the inevitable, and I'll put away the gun."

"I promise not to attack you, if that's what you mean," said Rolier calmly. "I have no weapon, and only a crazy man would start a fight in the clouds."

"Agreed, then." Choteau spoke with some relief. He let a ray from the lantern fall on the barometer. "Eleven hundred! We had bounced up; now we're falling. At three hundred, I'll put a bullet through the bag."

"And get me shot as a spy, eh? Pleasant fellow."

"I'm damned sorry, upon my word." Choteau spoke earnestly. "Don't you see, Rolier, I've no choice? I had to get out of Paris or be shot. I've got to bring you down, or see your mail destroyed; get it into Prussian hands, or burn it with the balloon if we land in French territory. Life's at stake. I've no hard feelings, but—"

"But, for an American, you've sunk very low," broke in Rolier. A stifled oath told that the words went home.

He had observed something, under that ray of light. The glass tubing of the mercurial barometer, attached to the side of the basket, was directly above the end of a floorboard. He himself was at the other end of that same board.

The entire strategy and intention of Choteau was now perfectly clear. Obviously, he had been instructed by someone who knew balloons. At three hundred meters, puncture the bag; just above the earth, pull the rip-cord and chance the blind landing. And the bag, loaded with ballast, was falling. With that damned barometer to inform him, Choteau was the master of its destiny.

THE lights had vanished; the car was apparently motionless in space, in silence, in bitter cold. Rolier deliberately tramped hard on the end of the board with one foot, as he slid the other foot off. There was a crash, a tinkle, a rattle as the board fell back.

"What the devil!" Choteau opened the slide, and the ray of light showed the smashed tubing, the loose board. Rolier, carefully, was reaching over the basket-edge, detaching ballast bags. He let three bags go, unperceived by the other.

"This confounded floorboard!" he exclaimed in apparent dismay. "Look!"

He shifted weight, the board flew up a little, fell back. From the American came an explosive oath. Rolier spoke again, calmly, encouragingly.

"Come! There's another here, on this side of the car; an aneroid—"

"Blast you! I half believe you did it on purpose!" cried Choteau, shifting the light to Rolier's face and figure.

Rolier smiled.

"Don't be absurd, Choteau. How could I have done it purposely, for what reason? My life's precious to me. Besides, here's the aneroid."

"True," Choteau admitted grudgingly.

ROLIER'S brain was racing. Despite silence and lack of apparent motion, he knew the balloon must have gone far upward, to where tempest velocity was whirling it along. He could feel that the air was colder. And when Choteau threw the light on the aneroid indicator, he caught his breath; three thousand meters, nearly ten thousand feet!

"What's that blasted thing?" exclaimed Choteau in dismay. "What does it say?"

"Eh? Oh, I see! That's an old Russian aneroid." Rolier laughed lightly, to keep the exultation from his voice, when he saw that Choteau could not read it. "Nine hundred meters, it says; apparently we're staying about that height."

The other chewed on this for a moment, and clicked off the light.

"No smoking, I suppose? Not with the bag full of gas, eh?" said he. "Well, we'll drift along and see what happens. Rolier, I'm sorry, honestly; but I must push this thing through to the finish. I'm compelled by circumstances beyond my control."

"Say no more," said Rolier. "We're not enemies, up here; until we land, it's a truce. Eh?"

"With all my heart—but I mean to see those mail-pouches destroyed."

"Bah! Throw them over now, if you like; that is, all except the big one. That one's important. It has the mail for the provinces."

Choteau laughed, naturally disbelieving this entirely. He threw the light on the four pouches, each sealed and stenciled with the word "POSTES." The big one did look impressive. The others did not.

"The big one is the one that'll burn," said he cunningly. "And we'll throw over none at all, just now, my friend. You're not to send us up any higher. Don't touch the ballast, remember."



ROLIER

Rolier gave the word; they jumped, and

Rolier had no such intention, and said so. The old aneroid only registered to fifteen thousand feet; it was holding steady at ten thousand, and Rolier was far from happy at being so high. The thought actually terrified him, for it was his first flight.

There were other so-called instruments, designed for use by simple untutored seamen such as most of the pilots were. An arrow, hung well out from the car, which pointed up or down; just now it held almost level. A banderole of paper sent floating out in air, to indicate by its rise or fall whether the balloon tended down or up. Cigarette paper chopped fine; tossed out, it would indicate in conjunction with a compass the direction and speed of the course. Rolier played with these toys, while Choteau held the light on them, and he belittled the antics of the chopped-up paper, which indicated a terrific speed to the north and west.



went rolling over and over in deep snow that broke the force of the crash. . . . Safel

They began to descend, gradually. There was a basket of sandwiches and a bottle of wine. Rolier got it out and they shared it to the last crumb, the last drop. In the cold and darkness, oppressed by the infinity of space, by the lack of motion that was sensed, the two men insensibly drew more closely together; enmity was dormant, though Choteau now watched carefully to see that no ballast was dropped.

"It must be obvious to you," Rolier said at length, in his quiet way, "that we're far beyond any Prussian-occupied territory. I haven't the slightest idea where we are. It won't grow light before five. Now, I admit that I hate the idea of striking the earth in darkness. Will you abandon your insane idea of puncturing the bag?"

Choteau reflected. "I'm not so keen about such a landing myself. As you say, we're beyond Prussian territory—yes.

I'll wait until dawn; I can always burn the mail, with the balloon."

"Why must you, the guest and friend of France, thus betray her?"

"Never mind that," snapped the American.

"It's important," Rolier insisted gently. "Last night, your whole nest of spies in the Rue du Bac was captured—wiped out. It's known that they held a club over your head. But they'll all be dead by sunrise. You're not a scoundrel, my friend, by nature—"

"Be silent!" cried Choteau fiercely. "All this is none of your business! As a matter of fact," he added inconsistently, "I gave my oath, my word of honor, to accomplish this job. In return, the club held over me, as you term it, was destroyed. And in honor I'm bound to do the job, and I shall do it regardless."

Rolier reflected with a puzzled wonder at all this jumble of honor and motives.

The tone of Choteau was resolute, brooking no argument; the man was resolved.

"Do you hear anything?" asked the American suddenly. "It seems to me—listen!"

A reiterant and insistent murmur came to them. With a sudden exclamation, Rolier caught up the lantern and opened it. They had forgotten the aneroid for a long time, and with abrupt shock, he found the indicator almost at the bottom. He threw the light at the banderole—it hung straight up in the air. The balloon was actually falling fast.

"Quick! Shoot the light down!" Rolier pressed the lantern into the hands of Choteau. "That noise sounds like the ocean—yet it can't be possible! The cold must have condensed the gas."

They hung over the edge, the feeble ray of light piercing down. Abrupt panic seized them both. It was there, huge, vast, formless; not the earth, but the ocean, enormous waves upcurling! With a cry, Rolier loosed ballast, and Choteau got off another bag; terror was upon them both; they were two men seeking frantically to escape death.

"The North Sea—it must be!" exclaimed Rolier, who had pored carefully over maps. "God knows where we are, whither drifting! Thank heaven, dawn is at hand."

He attempted desperately to calculate distances, but it was quite impossible. That storm-wind at the higher level must have reached terrific speed; he remembered now that the creaking, yielding willow basket had been somewhat inclined, as though the balloon had been blowing along at an angle.

IN silence they watched the growing daylight and gazed down upon nothing. Then the ocean grew visible; the bag was falling again. At three thousand feet they realized the truth, and exchanged a glance. Nothing—just the tossing ocean. No land anywhere.

Rolier was first to rally.

"The gas won't last forever, you know," he said reflectively. "We've gone down fast since letting off that ballast; in fact, we haven't a lot of ballast left."

"The devil!" said Choteau, not slow to grasp the implications.

"We've gone northwest—how far, I can't say." Rolier tossed out some paper, eyed the compass, the sea below. "Hm! Still drifting at a good rate. Northwest. Therefore, farther toward Iceland."

"Look!" Choteau caught his arm and pointed upward, past the edge of the bag above. Clouds, rosy-tinted with the spears of dawn, floated there. "Aren't they going the other way?"

ROLIER watched attentively, and drew a deep breath.

"Apparently. And all Europe lies to the eastward. Ha! Let's chance the upper level, then! A west wind may blow us back."

They cast loose the ballast. Two thousand meters, two thousand five hundred—paper was thrown out and compared with the compass. A shout burst from them together. They were being carried on a west wind, at this upper level!

Their exultation was not long-lived, for gradually the bag sank again. The last of the ballast was cast off. With the spy-glass, Rolier examined the horizon, as they bounded far upward; that sunlit horizon showed only sea. But, high up, the west wind was strong.

Choteau looked up at the pigeon cage, and his hard features softened.

"That's a hell of a thing!" he said. "Give 'em a chance."

He reached up to the cage, loosed it, and jerked open the door-bars. One by one the pigeons came out, took wing, fluttered and then soared in circles. Rolier looked at them, turned to the American, and smiled.

"You might be worse, comrade," he said, and Choteau grinned sheepishly.

Over, now, with everything. Grapnel and line, all instruments, overcoats, floorboards; every object was stripped from the basket, except the mail-pouches. The balloon zoomed up to a great height, and hope sprang anew. Rolier, who had saved the spy-glass, uttered a cry of joy and thrust the glass at his companion.

"Look! The eastern horizon!"

Choteau focused. "Ah! Looks like ice-fields—no, it's land! Land!"

But would they reach it? An hour passed, and it was all too evident that their craft was approaching the sea once more; the bag above them was no longer bellying smooth and taut. It was beginning to buckle.

The land, however, drew near. What land, it was impossible to say; it was all an expanse of unbroken snow. Excitement, suspense, gripped the two men as they clung and stared. The sun, now high in the heavens, was far to the south. The horrible conviction grew upon them both that this was some region of the

Arctic. Closer came the land, but ever closer came the water below; at length the slow peril became certainty. They were not fifty feet above the water, and the land was a good two miles away. Rolier tossed over the spy-glass.

"You still have your pistol," he said.

"Revolver," corrected Choteau, and hauled out the heavy weapon. He looked at Rolier. "You still have your mail-sacks. Put over the big one. It'll save our lives and accomplish my errand."

Rolier dissembled the elation in his heart. He shook his head.

"No, no! The others first—"

"The big one first!" cried Choteau fiercely. "It's a good hundred kilos; it'll put us ashore, you fool!"

Rolier shrugged and turned sadly away, to hide the smile in his eyes.

"Very well, I agree," he said. "Give me a hand with it."

Choteau, with an exclamation of eager triumph, threw away his revolver and bent to the task. Together they lifted the heavy bag and tossed it over. The basket rocked; the sea fell away and away, only a splash below marking the fate of the big pouch.

"After all, it was necessity," said Rolier, with assumed gloom.

"Precisely. Will you forgive me?" Choteau cried impulsively, extending his hand. "We need not be enemies. The shore approaches. Keep your other sacks; I'm satisfied. This had to be done, in any case."

"Right," said Rolier, and shook hands. He glanced up. "Look out! Be ready—the bag is emptying fast!"

The big white bag was, indeed, doubling over and threatening to collapse. They were falling again, but this time falling upon virgin snow. The shore was under them, and just in time; once away from that upper stratum, the balloon began to drop like a plummet.

CLIMBING to the edge of the basket, the two men hung there, poised, awaiting the crash. Silent and swift, the snowy world uprose. Rolier gave the word; they jumped, and went rolling over and over in deep snow that broke the force of the crash.

Together they scrambled clear, gained footing, stood panting and staring in a wild access of emotion. Safe! The earth again under their feet! There lay the balloon near by, a crumpled mass, its basket filled with snow.

Rolier's heart sang. The precious dispatches were safe; Choteau, so certain was he of having dumped the proper bag into the sea, said no more about burning the balloon. Nor, without his revolver, could he have managed it. At the moment, nothing mattered except the supreme fact of safety,

SIX hours they tramped southward along the shore and saw never a sign of life. With night approaching, a deserted hut appeared. They made for it, half dead with hunger, cold and exhaustion. In the hut they found everything they lacked—food, firewood, blankets. And, to start their fire, old newspapers. On these Rolier seized, to look up with a startled cry.

"Norwegian! We're in Norway, do you understand? Three thousand kilometers from France!"

"Good; the farther the better," Choteau said coolly. He trimmed the oil lamp, then straightened up and faced the pilot. "Well, my friend, suppose we settle matters, eh? Do we become enemies once more?"

Rolier met the challenge with a smile. One of the first principles of war, somebody had once told him, was never to push a beaten enemy to extremes. Choteau was beaten and did not know it; so much the better. As to that pouch dropped in the sea, Rolier was certain that it would float, and could be retrieved.

"Science is a wonderful thing," answered Rolier whimsically, thinking of the broken barometer that had lost the whole game for Choteau. "Didn't I say that it leads to results, rather than achieves them?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Choteau. His eyes narrowed. "Friends or enemies?"

"Well, science brought us to Norway without knowing it; *n'est-ce pas?*" Rolier chuckled. "My dear fellow, so far as I know officially, you are Leon Bezier. You have the papers to prove your identity. We're in neutral territory, where there are neither friends nor enemies; why try to improve upon the dictates of God? My only concern is to look after the remaining sacks of mail. . . . How about it, *mon ami?*"

"So be it!" said Choteau, relaxing in quick delighted warmth.

Once more they shook hands—men together escaped twice over, from death.

Another story of this vivid series will appear in an early issue.

A novel and vivid detective story by the able author of the Tiny David series.

By ROBERT R. MILL

SHE had flaming red hair, and her spectacles almost succeeded in imparting a note of primness to a face that was definitely *gamine*. Her pert nose turned slightly as she indicated a door that bore neat lettering.

"You are 'Charles Wood, Investigations'?"

The tall young man smiled. "Guilty."

She drew a deep breath. "There are several approaches, but this is the most direct: I want a job."

His smile faded. "Sorry." He hesitated. "In another week or two I'll be looking for one myself."

Her eyebrows became question-marks.

"So murder, arson and robbery have their ups and downs!" she said. "I thought that was peculiar to the newspaper business. You see, I was a newspaper gal, until yesterday. Then two papers merged. You know: 'Best features of both retained.' Apparently I wasn't one of the best features. But you didn't ask for three hundred words on my troubles."

His smile had returned. "I can take it," he told her. "We might even raise the word limit."

She shook her head. Then she read aloud from diplomas hanging on the walls:

"'Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice'"—"New York State Police'"—"New York City Police'"—"Homewood University." She whistled. "All that should get you something."

He smiled wryly. "It has," he admitted. "A chance at some divorce work." He made a gesture of distaste. "No, thanks."

She studied him through narrowed eyelids. "I get it! The new type of dick. College man—the Queen's English rather than *dese* and *dose*. A microscope instead of a blackjack. Ethics. Regards detective work as a profession." She noted the athletic build. "And don't be misled by the quiet voice, and the general appearance of a bank executive. No storybook stuff, but efficient and deadly. Well, the world has been waiting for it,



"Stretch out on the sofa in the next

and needing it. But is the world really ready for it?"

"That's easy," he told her. "The answer is that come next rent day, 'Charles Wood, Investigations' becomes one of Mr. Hoover's bright young men. That is, if Mr. Hoover hasn't changed his mind."

She pulled off her ridiculous little hat.

"I had a hunch when I saw the name on the door. I always play my hunches. Lucky Sue Bickford, they call me." She settled down behind the typewriter-desk. "I work here. From now on."

"You do not," he told her. "The first is four days away. They collect promptly. It is a quaint old custom. Then the name comes off the door."

She waved a hand airily. "We draw severance pay. Price of surrendering our artistic status, if any, and joining a union—only we call it a Guild. But be that as it may, it means another thirty days, and then some."

"That," he declared, "is out."

She sighed with relief. "I am so glad you didn't say '*definitely*.' Lord, how I



room for a minute," she urged him. "Give me a chance to do the dishes."

hate that word." She tried the typewriter. "I am going to like it here."

He took a step forward. "See here, Miss Bickford, if that is your name. You—"

"Never argue with the help," she warned him. "Besides, you belong back in that private office, playing the big executive."

He started to protest, then grinned and surrendered.

"All right," he told her. "You work here—for four days."

"That," she declared, "beats making the rounds of offices." Her grimace caused him to smile. "I hate walking."

"Better get in practice," he warned her.

"You must not have heard me," she said. "Lucky Sue Bickford, they call me."

THE first day produced nothing to justify the name. The second was equally uneventful—only a salesman or two and one prospective client, a man the girl disliked on sight.

She closed the door of the private office before announcing the caller.

"I don't like his looks," she admitted, "but can't we use him to pay the rent?"

Then the prospective client was admitted; and she was back at her desk only a short time when he emerged, red of face and muttering.

Charles Wood appeared beside her desk.

"I gather," she said, "that we will not use him to pay the rent. I am very quick like that." He started to speak, but she continued: "I know. Tomorrow is the third day. I never was good at figures, but I believe the fourth comes next. And come the fourth—"

The third day dawned uneventfully. They were at their desks, and the door of the private office was partly open.

"Let's concentrate," she urged. "Let's both say: 'The door will open. It will be a client. It will be the kind of client—'"

She broke off abruptly as the shadow of a man loomed large on the glass of the outer door. She was hard at work when a distinguished-looking man entered.



Horace
Wildron

"Good morning," she greeted him.

"Good morning." He produced a card. "I would like to see Mr. Wood. If necessary, I would prefer to wait until he is able to give me quite a bit of his time."

She appeared uncertain. "Have you an appointment?"

"No."

Her doubt increased. "Just a moment. Won't you have a chair?"

SHE knocked on the door of the private office, entered, and carefully closed the door behind her.

"He looks like the answer to all the prayers of all the unemployed," she told him. "Wait five minutes, then give me a buzz and I'll show him in. The name,"—she consulted the card the visitor had given her,—“is Horace Wildron.”

The owner of the name, when admitted to the inner office, wasted no time.

"Mr. Wood, just how busy are you?"

Charles Wood hesitated.

"Well—"

Wildron smiled.

"That verifies what I was told." He mentioned the name of a man prominent in law-enforcement. "He told me of your ability, and he said that you are honest. Perhaps you are not overburdened with clients?"

"You are the first," said Wood.

"Good. I hope to be your only client."

He saw the surprise on the face of the man behind the desk.

"Let me tell you a story, Mr. Wood. Twenty years ago two poor immigrant youths landed in this country. They pooled what little money they had, and started a small business. The going was hard, but they were young, willing to work and optimistic.

"There came a day when one of the partners went to the wholesale district to do some buying. He carried a small sum of money, because the credit of the firm had not been established. He never returned."

There was a brief pause.

"The other partner went to the police. He was young, without money or influence, and he spoke the language imperfectly. Furthermore, he had nothing definite to offer. I can't truthfully say that he was treated rudely, but it was very easy for a cynical policeman to suggest that the missing partner had his own motives for vanishing. It was equally easy for busy officers to content themselves with routine procedure, perhaps a few circulars distributed."

There was a longer pause.

"More than a month went by before the body of the missing partner was found. He had been murdered. Robbery was the motive. But by that time the trail was cold."

His fists were clenched.

"I see you have guessed it. That man was my partner. The little business prospered, and I have much more than I ever will need. Neither of us had a family, so there is only one thing I can do in an effort to settle part of my obligation to that partner.

"There must be hundreds of crimes like that—crimes affecting obscure persons without means or influence; crimes so well hidden that hard-worked and cynical policemen fail to notice them—or crimes that can be solved only by the aid of resources beyond the means of the average police force."

He studied Wood's face.

"Do you see what I mean?"

Wood nodded. "I think I do."

"Good. The rest of my life will be devoted to solving crimes of that sort. You will be able to come across many of them. For months I have been going through scores of newspapers. It has been a fruitful search." He smiled. "We will manage to keep you busy."

Little fires of interest were dancing in Wood's eyes.

"But this should not be a one-way crusade, Mr. Wildron. There also are people,

poor and without influence, but innocent, who are caught in a web of circumstance, and who have no means of clearing themselves." He studied his prospective client. "I consider them equally important, just as worthy of aid. I think going to their assistance would also serve the memory of your partner."

Wildron extended his hand.

"I was hoping you'd say that. We will get on well together. —Here."

He produced five newspaper clippings.

"Please glance over these, and then tell me what impresses you the most."

Wood studied the items.

"Five men, in five widely separated sections of the country, have disappeared. Each man was at least moderately well to do, had no dependents and had retired from business. Each man went on a trip to an unannounced destination, and failed to return."

"Exactly," Wildron agreed. "And each case was listed as a simple affair of a missing person. There was no particular reason for the police in any of these places to be unusually suspicious. But when the clippings—they cover a period of over a year—came to the desk of a man who has reason to take interest in what is not too obvious—well—"

He leaned forward. "This is the sort of thing I have in mind. You are interested?"

Wood was sorting the clippings.

"I am, Mr. Wilson. These cases are too much alike not to have some connection."

"Exactly. There will be other things of a similar nature. You can give me all your time?"

Wood considered briefly. "Yes. Say for a trial period of six months."

"Good." Wildron produced a check-book. "This is an advance against expenses—and this is a retaining fee. Later, we will work out a weekly fee, with a bonus for each case successfully completed. I think you will find me fair, and I know you will be reasonable."

WILDRON had left when Wood pushed the buzzer. Sue Bickford was all efficiency as she answered. He showed her the two checks. She examined them closely.

"Isn't that nice, Mr. Vanderbilt? How soon does he want the murders committed?"

"The name is Wood," he corrected her. "And the gentleman wants murders prevented, rather than committed. Take a look at these."



Charles
Wood

He passed over the clippings.

She hesitated. "Just a minute. Practical Sue Bickford, they call me. Do I work here, now that we are in the chips, so to speak?"

"You do."

"In that case, I'll give this my undivided attention."

It was a good ten minutes later when she looked up from the clippings.

"What do you think?" she asked.

He grinned. "My thoughts are private, but you are paid to think out loud."

She toyed with her spectacles.

"Why do you wear those?" he asked.

"According to Dorothy Parker, they protect a gal from passes."

"You won't need them here."

She removed the glasses. "The expression you see," she declared, "is either relief or disappointment. But to get back to the five children—"

She poked at the clippings. "All pillars of the community, more or less. All leave on a mysterious trip. The answer is—a gal."

"Good, so far," he admitted. "But how did they meet the gal?"

"I wouldn't know that, but I haven't a set of diplomas. Do you know the answer, Mr. Watson?"

"I think so." He scribbled on a pad. "Will you duck down to a news-stand and get me these so-called magazines?"

She glanced at the list. "I am blushing," she declared.



"Both hands up, both of you!" Wood ordered.

"I'll go," he offered.

"No," she declared, "it will be educational. Studious Sue Bickford, they call me."

Soon she was back with an armful.

"You will be heartbroken to hear that *Hot Harem Nights* is no more," she told him. "It seems there was some trouble with the postal authorities. You know how they are. But these survivors should keep you going for some time."

He was grinning as he divided the publications into two piles.

"For you, Miss Bickford." He pushed one pile at her. "Never shall it be said that you have a selfish boss. Clip out all the ads dealing with 'lonely hearts,' 'pen pals,' or matrimonial or acquaintance clubs."

She gave a mock sigh of relief.

"So that explains it. I was beginning to think I was too hasty about the spectacles."

They worked in silence, and a pile of clippings grew steadily. Soon the last of the publications was clipped.

"Next?" the girl asked.

Charles Wood grinned. "I live in northern New York. I am an apple-grower."

"Not in that suit," she told him. "It whispers of Fifth Avenue."

"The suit will be changed when I step into character," he promised. "I have made quite a bit of money, and I want to retire. I have planned to travel. I would like a bit of feminine company in the va-

rious places I visit." He indicated the clippings. "These should give it to me."

She was reading the advertisements.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Some of these may be more or less on the level. If our guess is right, the lady you are trying to land wouldn't deal with anything legitimate. Therefore we lose a lot of time on harmless leads. I am quick like that."

"No, we don't," he retorted. "We make our letter so raw that no legitimate agency will turn us loose among its trusting lonely hearts. We will typewrite these letters on plain paper. Then we will have them mailed from northern New York. A friend of mine in the State Police will take care of that. Get your notebook, Miss Bickford."

Soon the letter was drafted.

"Write that in answer to each of these advertisements," he directed.

TWELVE letters were sent north to be mailed. Soon the State Police forwarded replies, which had been sent to a dummy address. Five of the agencies ignored the letter. Three wrote to say they were not interested in that sort of business. Four offered to forward lists of "prospective brides" or "pen pals" upon receipt of various amounts.

"Now we are getting somewhere," said Wood. "We will answer these, and have our State Police friends send them money orders. Isn't it wonderful what a lonesome boy can do?"

Sue Bickford was studying one of the lists.

"So that's how they do it. Nice to know, isn't it?"

He chuckled.

"Get your book. Each gal on the lists gets a letter from that old roué of an apple-grower, Charley Wood. We must be careful with this letter. It must be raw enough to scare off the poor deluded souls who honestly think romance can be bought with a stamp and a filthy magazine, but it mustn't be too obvious. Let's have some of your very best thinking."

She frowned with concentration, and chewed the end of her pencil.

"Right. Tactful Sue Bickford, they call me."

SEVERAL hundred letters went out, and were mailed by the State Police. In due time a batch of replies came in. Wood returned from lunch to find the girl reading away.

"I am blushing," she told him. "But now that my blushes have subsided a bit, I find that this high-grade tripe sorts easily into three classifications: Basket number one—it is full enough to delight the heart of a certain apple-grower—contains replies from gals whose chief trouble seems to be that they never learned to say no. Otherwise they seem harmless enough."

She indicated the second basket:

"A veil of mercy should cover that. Just nice gals at heart, but so darned lonesome or discouraged that they are almost willing to take a chance on finding romance with that louse of an apple-grower. Made me want to take a poke at him when I read some of those letters. One of them hopes the love of a good woman will change you. Ha, little does she know you!"

"But now we come to the most interesting of my little yellow baskets. Nine letters in that. Every one a possibility."

She placed the baskets on his desk.

"That's how Miss Sue James Farley takes care of the mail. But you better double-check. I haven't any diplomas."

"We will get you one some day," he promised as he began to read.

Sometime later the buzzer summoned her.

"We see almost eye to eye," he informed her. "Nothing, as they say in the papers, that cannot be ironed out around the conference table. I have merely taken one from Basket Number One and added it to Basket Three, increasing the

possible eligibles to ten. By the way, who is your favorite among the eligibles?"

"This is just the winter book," she declared. "But—" She produced a sheet of rose-colored paper and read the signature. "But I am offering even money on one Mrs. Lulu Haykos, of Brendt, Iowa."

He chuckled as he picked up a sheet of white paper.

"My money goes on Mrs. Alice Madent, of Greentop, Maryland. Just listen to this: 'I am not one to expect a man to spend money on me all the time. I don't expect to be took places all the time. I like a good time, but I can get pleasure at home.' There is a girl who knows her apple-growers, and who caters to them. And make a note of this: 'I got a nice home which is some distance from any nosey neighbors. I believe in minding my own business and expect others to do the same. If you was to decide to pay a little visit, I would send directions to find the house and would suggest you say nothing to folks in this neighborhood. My policy is that what they don't know won't hurt them.' There, Miss Bickford, is a gal!"

He read on:

"Oh, yes: 'I shall be glad to send you a photograph, and hope you will do the same.' Fair enough. She shall have the picture. All the eligibles rate answers, but I am banking on sweet Alice."

PROMPTLY, suitable answers were relayed to the various eligibles, and replies were received in due course.

"Your entry," Wood told his assistant, "is scratched. Holy matrimony is her real object. Furthermore, the applicant would be expected to stand scrutiny by her pastor."

"That lets her out," the girl agreed. She studied her employer's profile. "And I doubt if you would make the grade."

Mr. Wood chose to ignore the thrust.

"My own entry, the coy Alice, joins your peerless Lulu in the discards. After her promising start, she slips up in the stretch. She now suggests that it might be better if she visited me at my home. She indicates that the price of a railroad ticket would be gratefully received."

"The best way to eliminate her," declared Sue Bickford, "is to send the money."

"Exactly," he agreed, "but we are interested in murder, not larceny." He picked up a third letter. "And that brings us to one Viola Batmos, of Placer, Pa., who in every letter and in every way

is getting more and more eligible. Just listen to this:

"I guess families and close friends has done more to break up friendships and more between folks than anything else. You needn't worry about me, because I haven't any. I am alone in the world. It is best to have those things understood at first, so I would appreciate it if you would be as frank with me as I have been with you."

Wood smiled.

"In other words: 'Who is there to cause trouble if you turn up missing?' And to get back to the letter: 'I carry a little life insurance, which is made out to a bank that will act as my executor. If our friendship ripens as I think it will, I will make this over to you.' That, of course, is a bid for me to come across with the same information."

Sue Bickford looked puzzled.

"But how would she be able to collect it without establishing the death of the apple-grower?"

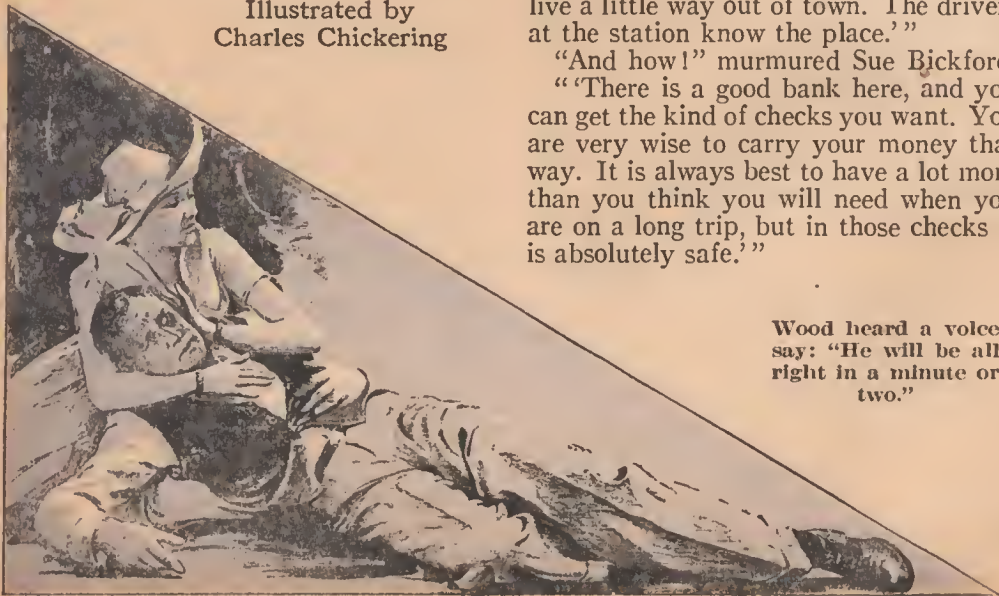
Wood shook his head.

"She has no intention of trying to cash in on that. She is merely asking part two of Question One. If the apple-grower has insurance, the beneficiary of that policy is apt to press the inquiry if he vanishes. Lovely Viola—she really isn't too bad-looking, judging by the enclosed picture—wouldn't want that."

Sue examined the photograph.

"Hum. If you ask me, that dame would cut your throat and then curse you for getting blood on the carpet. She ought to be named 'Mrs. Murder.'"

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering



Charles Wood chuckled, as he said:

"I doubt if Viola goes in for anything as crude as cutting throats. But let's give Viola a chance to speak for herself. And this, incidentally, will tell the story."

HE began to scribble on a piece of yellow paper.

"We want quick action," he explained. "I'll write her that I am planning a trip around the world, but that I would like to stop off and see her first. I'll ask her if there is a bank in Placer where I can buy 'them checks that people on trips uses.' That will convince her that I have plenty of money on my person, and that I am being discreet in the old home town. But we will have to make it plausible. Lend me your very best brains, Miss Bickford."

Miss Bickford did, and soon they had a letter written that satisfied them both. It was sent on to the State Police, and soon they received an official gray envelope containing an enclosure.

They made a little ceremony of opening it.

"Dearest Charley," Wood read aloud. "There is nothing coy about Viola," he explained.

"Get on with the letter," Sue Bickford ordered.

"My heart will be thumping terribly fast until you arrive. Let me know what day it will be, and make it soon."

"The picture must have done it," Sue Bickford murmured.

He ignored the interruption.

"Come right to the house. I wouldn't feel right to know you was at a hotel. I live a little way out of town. The drivers at the station know the place."

"And how!" murmured Sue Bickford.

"There is a good bank here, and you can get the kind of checks you want. You are very wise to carry your money that way. It is always best to have a lot more than you think you will need when you are on a long trip, but in those checks it is absolutely safe."

Wood heard a voice say: "He will be all right in a minute or two."

He put the letter aside. "There is a lot more." He assumed shyness. "But it is what you might call personal."

"And the postal inspectors might have another word for it," she declared.

"Possibly," he admitted. "But to get back to business. Today is the third. We write Viola that I will arrive on the morning of the seventh. On the morning of the sixth you will arrive at the hotel in Placer."

"But my mother," Sue Bickford protested, "always told me never to go on trips with my employer."

"You will not be with your employer," he told her. "Mr. Wildron wants to be in on the kill. He is paying for the party, and he has more than a financial interest in it, so why shouldn't he? You will be with him. He will be your uncle."

"How nice!" she murmured. "Think I will need my spectacles?"

"I doubt it," he said. "All you have to do is sit around the hotel. I'll work fast, and I'm betting Viola will too. Getting in on the early morning train, I should have it finished by evening. But even if I don't, I'll manage to get in touch with you by seven in the evening. That is, unless something has happened."

Sue Bickford looked thoughtful.

"And in case something *has* happened?" she asked.

"Then you hunt up one of the good-looking young men in the Pennsylvania State Police, and, as the tabloids say, tell all. I haven't any desire to be the subject of a sixth newspaper clipping for Mr. Wildron's collection."

"Why not see the good-looking young man first—just in case?" she demanded.

"Because it wouldn't make me happy to hear him laugh if we have guessed wrong, Miss Bickford."

VIOLA BATMOS bustled about the kitchen of her home as she prepared an early supper. A slice of rosy country ham turned a rich brown in the frying-pan. Viola, middle-aged, slightly plump and rather attractive in a hard way, turned to the other occupant of the room and sniffed in anticipation.

"Smells good, don't it?"

The man in the chair at the far end of the room nodded. There was little about his appearance to resemble the man of "*Charles Wood, Investigations*." His indifferently fitting blue serge suit was of the variety known in rural sections as a store suit. His heavy shoes were care-



"This young lady called in the Marines; the results justified her decision."

fully blackened. A barber had managed to transform a faultless haircut into something to cause most men to shudder. Carefully tended fingernails had been broken, roughened and blackened a bit.

"It sure does smell good," he admitted. "By the way, Viola, I must get down to that there bank first thing in the morning. You sure they got them checks I want?"

She turned the sizzling ham with a deft motion of her hand.

"Sure. They got 'em. That is, I mean to say they got any reasonable amount. How much was you fixing to get turned into 'em?"

He appeared to hesitate.

"Well, the way I got things figured out, I worked hard all my life, and things haven't stacked up too bad for me. I got some pleasures coming my way. I seen a notice in a newspaper about a steamship firm that takes you clear around the world for about twelve hundred dollars. I figure to buy myself that pleasure. Be a sight of things to see on the way around, and I figure to need about as much again just for that. Then you never know just what's going to turn up."

He fumbled in an inside pocket and produced a wallet filled with banknotes.

"On top of that, I had me some money in a bank that don't pay enough interest to amount to nothing. And at times I calculate to be out of shouting distance of that bank." He slipped his fingers through the bills. The woman's eyes widened with greed, but she resolutely turned and gave her attention to the cooking. "Sort of figured I might as well

have that money with me, on account of them checks being good and safe." He stopped to figure, and his lips moved and his fingers twitched as he counted. "All told, reckon I better have about five thousand dollars in them checks."

There was a woodshed behind the kitchen, and from that shed, as the amount was mentioned, there came a rustling noise. Inwardly, Wood prepared for danger. Apparently the critical hour was close at hand. And there was an accomplice to be dealt with.

The woman laughed aloud in an effort to cover the noise from the shed.

"Guess they can take care of you without any trouble," she said.

She placed several serving-dishes on the table.

"Set up," she directed.

Wood took the chair she indicated, which forced him to sit with his back turned to the door of the shed. Directly ahead of him was a window, through which the rays of the late afternoon sun were shining. He blinked his eyes rapidly, and scraped the legs of the chair along the floor.

"Reckon I'll move over so I can get my eyes open enough to give that there good-smelling ham a real battle."

Now he was seated so that his eyes commanded a view of the door.

The woman glared at him, then regained her composure.

"Aint you the pernickety one!" she taunted him.

He attempted heavy humor.

"Movin' closer to you, aint I?"

She simpered as she seated herself.

"Go on! Whole lot you think of me, fixing to go traipsing around the world, when we could be right comfortable here. What's wrong with this place?"

His knife came to a halt a bare three inches from his mouth.

"Aint nothin' the matter with it," he admitted. "Nice house. Nice grounds. Sort of like to think I was coming back to it."

She smiled upon him.

"Maybe we can get together on it—later," she said complaisantly.

OUTWARDLY at ease, Wood was eating warily. The woman ate of the ham. He attacked his. She raised a fork loaded with mashed potatoes to her mouth. Mentally he included potatoes in his fare. The meal continued.

She brought a coffeepot to the table, and filled two cups. He reached across

the table and took the cup nearest the woman. She gave no sign of surprise.

"Cream?" She pushed a pitcher to him.

He helped himself liberally. He pushed the pitcher back. She added cream to her cup. He waited until she took three hearty swallows. Then he relaxed.

"Me," she said, "I don't smoke, but you're at liberty to drag out one of them nails of yours."

He lighted a cigarette.

The woman was eying him closely, expectantly. He glanced at the woodshed door, saw that it was closed tightly. Then he suppressed a sudden desire to yawn.

"Stretch out on the sofy in the next room for a minute, if you got the mind to," she urged him. "Give me a chance to do the dishes and some redding up."

"Nah," he said. "Reckon I'll stay here and watch you." He stretched. "Dunno what makes me so sleepy."

There was a smile on the face of the woman as she went about her work.

AN overpowering desire for sleep seized Wood. He attempted to fight it, then realized this was a losing fight. The woman had been too clever. Somehow she had managed to administer a drug. Probably the potatoes, with one end of the dish—the one he naturally would help himself from—filled with drugged food, while the other end, from which the woman served herself, was harmless; but he gave up trying to solve the problem. Too late for that now.

Judging from his feelings, he had taken a powerful sleeping-potion. Or it might be something more dangerous than that. But that was beside the point for the moment. More serious danger was pressing.

Outwardly pretending to yield to the desire for sleep, he braced himself to fight it off; but soon he realized that could not be done. There was only one hope: to hasten the climax, and bring it about while he was able to cope with it.

He closed his eyes, slipped forward in the chair, and allowed his mouth to fall open. His breathing became loud and forced.

The woman eyed him closely. Then she spoke from the corner of her mouth:

"Let's go!"

The door of the woodshed opened. A man entered. He halted beside the woman, a twisted grin on his face.

Abruptly Wood was standing before them, with a revolver in his hand. The gun covered the woman, then the man.

"Both hands up, both of you!" Wood ordered.

His hand which held the revolver was like lead. His feet, as he took a step forward, were wooden. It required actual physical combat to keep his eyes open, to force his brain to function.

A stout clothesline hung at one end of the kitchen. He ripped it down. Laboriously he formed a noose, and threw it over the shoulders of the man; that done, he proceeded to make a thorough job of binding him, but it was tough going. Then he searched the fellow, and found a revolver and a blackjack.

He knew that it was a race against time as he turned his attention to the woman. His feet and his hands were harder to control. The woman had recovered from her first surprise, and found her voice. His own tongue was thick as he attempted to reply:

"No—not accusing you of robbery. . . . Accusing you of murder. . . . Least five murders, to be exact."

All the while he was binding her with strips he tore from dishtowels which hung near the stove. Dimly he sensed that the job was far from perfect, but knew that it would have to do.

Then he staggered away from the woman, and stood for a moment trying to collect his thoughts. There was no telephone in the house and the nearest dwelling was a good mile away; he knew he could not make that.

The problem was solved by a dark cloud that seemed to rush at him. He took half a step in the direction of a chair. Then he knew no more. . . .

The woman worked feverishly at the cloth tied about her wrists, tearing at the knots with her teeth. The man, who had ceased to struggle with the ropes that held him, urged her on. She was sobbing as she cried:

"I can't. These damn' things have cut my lips to slits."

"You got to," he threatened her. Derision blended with fear in his voice. "You sure can pick 'em. Apple-knocker! Like hell!"

THE woman worked on. After a long struggle she succeeded in freeing her hands. Then she fell back exhausted. But the man would give her no rest.

"That's it," he coached her. "Roll over to the table, pull yourself up, and grab yourself a knife."

She obeyed him. The knife made short work of the remaining strips. She pulled

herself to her feet. She was stiff. Every movement pained her. But the man had no mercy.

"Jeepers creepers! Come on! Want to sit and wait for the law to catch up with us?"

She made her way to his side, and slashed the ropes that held him. He rubbed his wrists and his ankles as he climbed to his feet. For just a moment they stood there side by side, a cruel look of anticipation upon their faces as they eyed the unconscious figure sprawled across the chair. Then they started toward that defenseless man.

They were almost at his side when a voice from the woodshed door said:

"Turn around, damn you! And keep your hands up while you do it!"

CHARLES WOOD struggled back to consciousness slowly. The first thing he knew, he heard a voice say: "He will be all right in a minute or two." Then he realized that his head was being held in the lap of a girl, and that the girl, whose head was bent over close to his, was Sue Bickford.

"What—" he began.

The man who had spoken before, and who obviously was a doctor, smiled.

"This young lady called in the Marines a little ahead of the agreed time. She was doubtful about doing it, but the results more than justified her decision. They will tell you all about it when they—here they are now."

Horace Wildron and three Pennsylvania State troopers entered the room. A man in the uniform of a sergeant stepped forward.

"As nice a haul as you could expect in a month of Sundays. Nice people! Five graves in the old back yard." He saw that Wood was conscious. "Two minutes later, and you'd have been a customer for the sixth. As sweet a racket as I ever bumped up against." He jerked a thumb at Horace Wildron. "But on top of this, and with his money and influence, we may be able to get appropriations so the Federal people can step out and make it impossible anywhere else."

Wildron nodded in emphatic approval.

"This," he said, "is one payment on my debt."

Sue Bickford bent closer to Wood. Her voice was low:

"How do you feel?"

"Great," said Wood. He grinned. "If I felt any better, Sue, you'd need your glasses!"

A Million for

*The dramatic climax of this great
novel of Personal Mystery.*

The Story Thus Far:

DEWERT had lost his job as a reporter, and was all but broke when Hartswell, the city editor who had fired him, recommended him for a strange job to Ephraim Brood, the wealthy soap-manufacturer.

"Ever hear of a ghost-writer?" Brood demanded of Dewert. "Well, you're going to be a ghost-actor. Personal mystery, boy, is the secret of worldly success; and I'm going to write a book to prove it. But I need a stooge—some one to demonstrate that this formula of mine for success really does succeed. Then I'll write my book about it. That's your job. You'll make a million dollars."

Bentley Dewert accepted the fantastic offer. Putting up at the Hotel Washington Towers, he bribed the clerk *not* to let another guest, a French airplane-buyer, know that he, John Destiny (that was the stage name he had chosen) was in residence. The hotel-clerk promptly tipped off the newspaper men—and before the dust settled, the airplane-manufacturer Hartlow had paid Destiny six thousand dollars to keep away from the buyer.

Personal mystery worked even in hard-boiled Wall Street too—and won a friend for Dewert in the hard-boiled Jo Caddis.

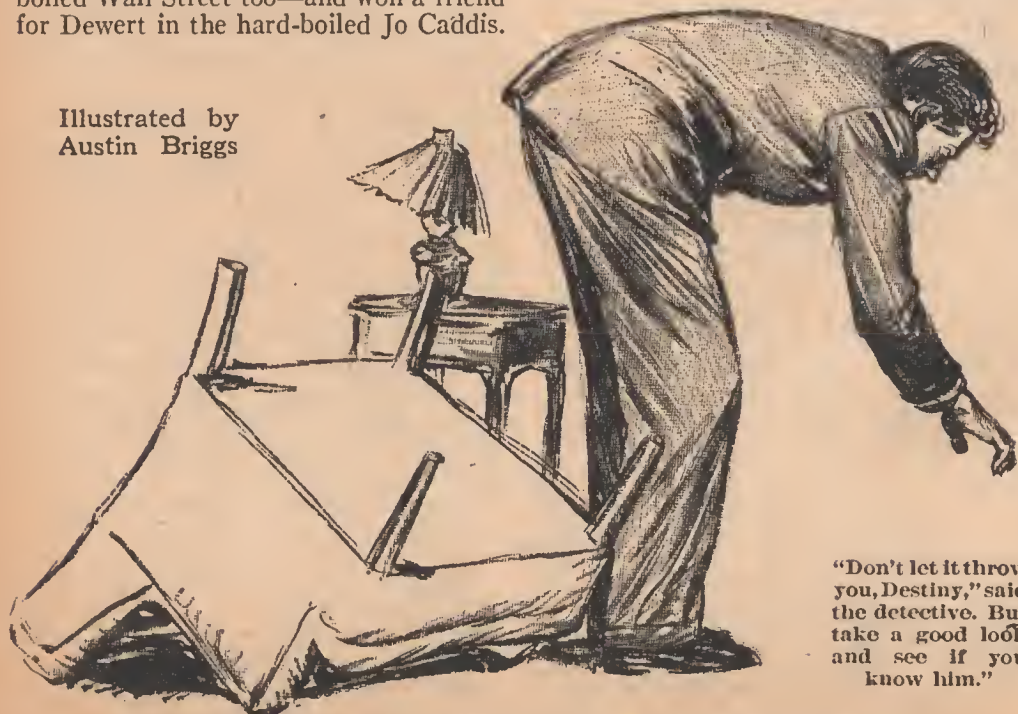
And it worked in the promotion of a fuel-saving invention which Leverford of World Fuels paid to keep off the market. Personal mystery won Dewert a huge sum for a month's work in advertising a mineral water for Senator Pinkton. And personal mystery, plus the capital he'd acquired, enabled him to make a killing in a mercury-ore mine.

In another quarter, however, Dewert ran into trouble. One night he was greatly taken by a pretty girl dining with an old gentleman in the Towers restaurant, when the old fellow choked on a fishbone and collapsed. Bentley took them to his rooms, called a doctor, and politely left them alone. When he returned, they had gone, leaving no word.

The newspapers soon supplied the answer: Lorraine Graymaster had aided her wealthy aged uncle to escape from the asylum in which he had been unjustly confined; and the two had disappeared.

Dewert learned that Graymaster's supposed insanity was based on his knowledge of a certain paralyzing light-ray which would be of the utmost value in war. Bentley was able to save Gray-

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



"Don't let it throw you, Destiny," said the detective. But take a good look and see if you know him."

John Destiny

By FULTON GRANT

master from a gang of foreign conspirators determined to get possession of the old man's secret, but was himself captured by them. . . . Personal Mystery—and plenty of nerve—worked again, however: Dewert came out of the fracas with a whole skin and a check for fifty thousand dollars. But later Lorraine, believing him responsible for certain newspaper stories about her, turned against him. (She did not know, of course, that Bentley had invested a hundred thousand dollars in her uncle's military lamp.)

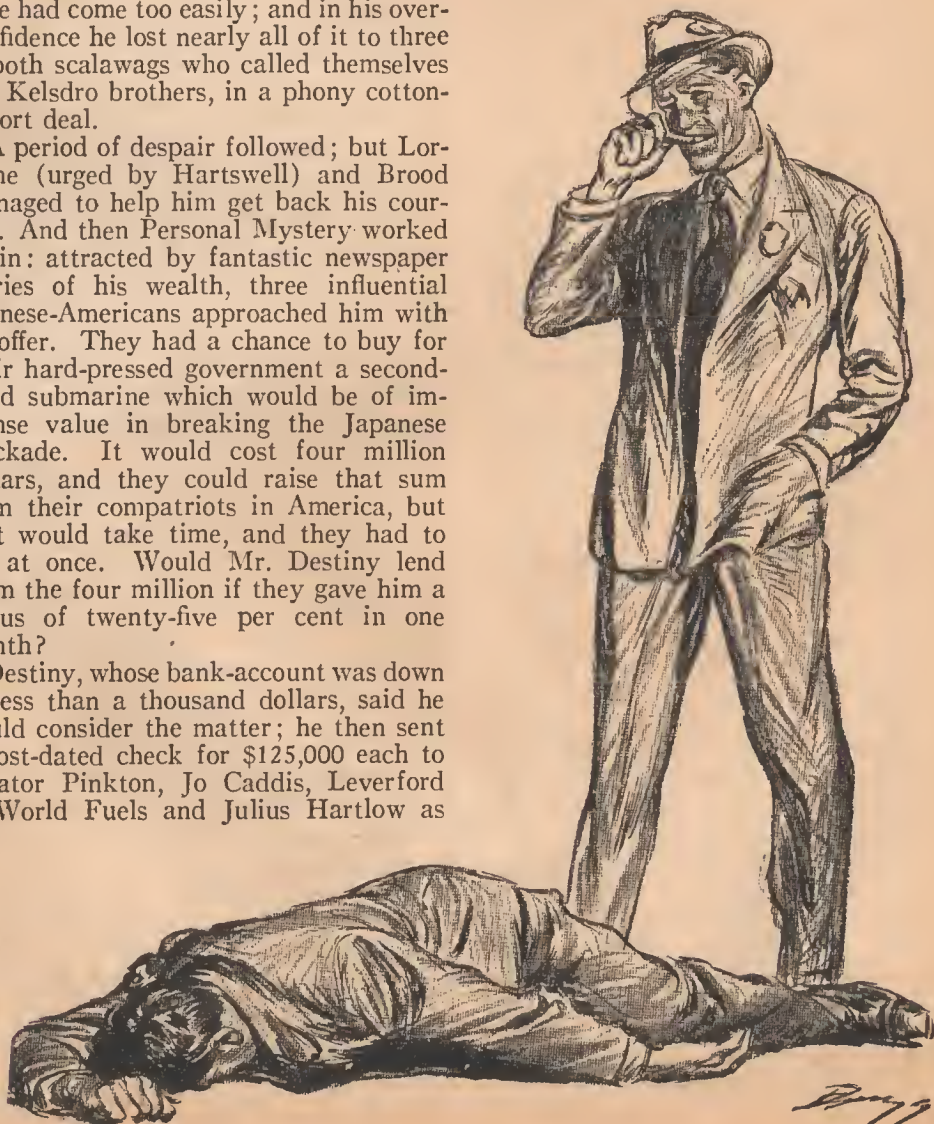
And then disaster befell: Bentley's fortune had come too easily; and in his overconfidence he lost nearly all of it to three smooth scalwags who called themselves the Kelsdro brothers, in a phony cotton-export deal.

A period of despair followed; but Lorraine (urged by Hartswell) and Brood managed to help him get back his courage. And then Personal Mystery worked again: attracted by fantastic newspaper stories of his wealth, three influential Chinese-Americans approached him with an offer. They had a chance to buy for their hard-pressed government a second-hand submarine which would be of immense value in breaking the Japanese blockade. It would cost four million dollars, and they could raise that sum from their compatriots in America, but that would take time, and they had to act at once. Would Mr. Destiny lend them the four million if they gave him a bonus of twenty-five per cent in one month?

Destiny, whose bank-account was down to less than a thousand dollars, said he would consider the matter; he then sent a post-dated check for \$125,000 each to Senator Pinkton, Jo Caddis, Leverford of World Fuels and Julius Hartlow as

their share of the bonus if they invested a million each with him. They were finally persuaded, and Dewert turned over the four million to his Chinese friends. That same evening, however, when he went to call on Lorraine Graymaster, the door of her apartment was opened by a policeman who arrested him on a charge of murder. (*The story continues in detail:*)

"MURDER!" That isn't a funny word. Generally you don't laugh when you hear it.



Murder isn't a joke, no matter how you look at it. But there was some perverse imp in Bentley's astonished brain that gave way to laughter when the cop made that crack, shocked by the incongruity of it.

"Murder!" You're all dressed up. You've come to see Lorraine. You're all excited and eager and happy, and you're going to show her what you've done—the biggest thing in your life. You're strong and full of pep, and you're all set to show off and swagger a little. You walk into her place on Park Avenue, and you go up in the elevator, and ring her doorbell—

And a cop reaches out and grabs you and makes a crack about a murder rap.

Sure, it's funny. It's so fantastic you could laugh your head off. So Bentley laughed.

"Now, now, my fine-feathered copper," he said to the policeman, "did you say 'murder?'"

BUT the joke stopped right there. For there was a click of steel at his wrists. A rough hand shoved him in the back, snapping his neck until it hurt. Another hand, just as rough, dragged him by the shoulder down a dark hallway, and gave him a shove through a door-frame which was dimly lighted, while a surly voice rumbled behind him:

"Here he is, Lieutenant. He come in easy."

And a final shove sent him into a brightly lighted room where there seemed a veritable sea of uniformed men, crowding around, all staring at him, all fixing him with accusing eyes, all hostile and ready to spring at him. Yes, the joke was gone now, and this was stark reality. Murder!

"Sit down," said a voice.

"You can take off the cuffs, O'Hare," said another.

"So you're young Destiny, are you?" said a third, harsh and husky and thick with irony. "You'll need all your luck now, Mister."

"Just a minute—" This was the second voice, the one which had ordered the handcuffs taken off. Bentley scarcely saw the bulk of the officer who leaned over him and unlocked the steel rings at his wrists. His staring eyes perceived a tall, thin, aging man with a wooden face and gray hair, who got up from the circle of men and stepped forward toward him. This one wore no uniform. His features were set in a mold of wrinkled

brows and sharp, questioning eyes. He came over and stood directly in front of Bentley, the smoke of a lighted pipe curling from his mouth. "Just a minute," he repeated, as though to the others in the room. "I'll handle this."

Then, to Bentley:

"A man's been murdered here," he said. "We haven't identified him yet. The Graymasters aren't here. They vanished around eight o'clock, just before the shooting was reported. You phoned at nine o'clock, Mr. Destiny. It was one of my men who answered. Maybe you don't know anything about this, but we're going to find that out. Murder is a bad business. If you're in the clear, you don't have to worry. I'm Cornell of the Homicide Bureau. Now tell me, just where were you between seven and nine o'clock this evening? Remember, we'll check up everything you say. Careful, now."

There was something about the tone of the man's voice that dispersed Bentley's bewilderment and put him quickly on the defensive, despite the shock and the near-panic that was in him. He managed to say, calmly enough, too:

"Wait a minute. I haven't murdered anybody, and I haven't done anything wrong. You can't push me around like this. I'm perfectly willing to tell you where I've been and all that, but first I've got a right to know just what's happened here. I came to see Miss Graymaster. Where is she?"

Detective Cornell considered the remark. Then—

"We don't know where she is," he said.

"You—you mean she—" Bentley began, but the policeman broke in:

"I mean just this: When our men got here, she wasn't here. Neither was her uncle. This place showed every sign of a struggle, or a fight. There was a man lying dead in this room—shot through the head. We've checked the fingerprints, and we find the prints of five persons, not three. That means there were two other persons here not yet accounted for. Now get this clearly: you *could* have been here yourself. You *could* have come back again—making a smart play. I don't say you did, but it's possible. And your name has been associated with Miss Graymaster's, by the newspapers. Not only that, but you don't enjoy too good a reputation, Destiny. You're in a spot until you can show us different. Now start talking, and make it good."

It was not easy. Bentley could talk well enough; he could prove his own in-

nocence. That didn't worry him much. But—murder—in Lorraine's apartment! . . . Lorraine and her uncle gone. What could it mean? How ghastly! How incredibly ghastly!

But he said:

"I see. I get your point, but it's no go. You can't pin anything on me. I took dinner at the Chinese restaurant called the Celestial on Forty-fourth Street. From there I went back to my hotel, got dressed and came here after one of your boys kidded me into thinking I'd talked to the Graymaster's manservant or something. You can check all that as much as you please. But"—the true undercurrent of his anxiety came out now—"but for God's sake, what *did* happen here? I can't believe—tell me, where are— Show me the murdered man. Maybe I can—" It was a confusion of ideas and thoughts and purposes, but Cornell seemed to understand that.

"Okay, son," he said. "Come along with me and take a look. Brummer, get on the phone and check with the Washington Towers hotel when Destiny came in and went out. O'Hare, you cover the Chink restaurant. Come on, son."

And he led the way through the frowning knot of policemen into the shadowy extremity of the room which the thick shade of the single bridge-lamp cast into semi-obscurity.

Bentley followed him; and as he did so, his amazement and his feeling of terror grew. The room, as he began to see it now, was a complete wreck. Pictures had fallen or had been snatched from the walls and lay helter-skelter on the floor. Chairs and tables were overturned. Bric-a-brac, broken, was strewn in pieces over the rich rug and hardwood. An exquisite Chinese inlaid cabinet lay with its door broken from the tiny hinges in the center of the room. Everything was askew; everything was thrown about as though a cyclone had blown through the place.

THEN, suddenly, at the extreme end, they came upon the body. It was like a great black lump, at first sight. Covered with a silken throw-rug now, it had no shape nor definition; but when Cornell lifted the cover, the ghastliness of it struck Bentley violently.

The dead man was big, burly, blond, close-shaven. He lay face downward, his arms and legs thrown out in a mad angle, one hand just touching a dark pool which began where the face lay.

"Don't," said the detective, "let it throw you, Destiny. But take a good look and see if you know him—only don't touch. We aren't through with him here yet."

FAR from wanting to touch the dead man, Bentley wanted to run, to dash out of the place, to go screaming out of the door. There was, he sensed at once, something faintly familiar about the dead man—the gray suit, the cropped blond hair and the muscular shoulders touched some sensitive note in his recollection. He tried to peer into the face, but recoiled at once. A shot had penetrated the skull just under the left ear and had come out of the face in a manner that destroyed almost any possibility of recognition. Yet suddenly recognition came. There could be no mistake. He had seen that man. He knew those strong hands and that sun-tanned neck. He knew that gray suit. He gasped:

"Good God! Ross—Peter Ross—"

Cornell did not miss that.

"Ross, huh?" he said. "Okay, boy, now who's Ross? Talk fast and pretty, now. Because we can hold you for a material witness."

Bentley got to his feet, shakily. It all fitted. Like a ghastly jigsaw puzzle whose pieces suddenly jumped together of their own accord, a complete picture flashed through his mind.

"Wait," he said, fighting for time. "Wait. I'll tell you. I'll give you all of it—only—only you've got to do something first."

"Huh? What?"

"Telephone the *Chronicle*. Get hold of J. C. Hartswell, the city editor. Get him down here. I want him to get this story exclusive. I won't talk until he's here."

"You—you won't, hey? Say, what in hell do you think this is? You'll talk, all right. Listen, son, this is a murder. We know how to loosen your tongue in case you think you can get funny. Now you start talking."

Bentley shook his head.

"Not till Hartswell's here," he said firmly. "This isn't a murder—not just a *murder*. This is an international incident. This is the biggest thing you ever stepped into, Mister, and I'm the only one who can give it to you. But I won't give it until Hartswell's here. Send for him, or go to hell."

Cornell eyed him. There was a look of determination upon Bentley's face that

convinced him he would get nowhere by high-handed methods. After all, it *was* a screwy case. A lot of angles weren't clear. You don't expect to find strange dead bodies lying in the flat of rich, social people like the Graymasters. Maybe this stubborn young cub could make it worth while.

"Okay," he said finally. "I'll get him down here. Murchis, get the *Chronicle* on the phone. I want the city desk."

AND that's the story," Bentley said in conclusion. "You can believe it or not; I don't care. This fellow's real name is *Rossenisch*—calls himself Peter Ross in this country. He was deadly enough, but he's not the worst of the bunch at all. They've got a place out in the country somewhere—sort of headquarters. They've got spies and agents everywhere. The Archduke—that's what he calls himself—is this Karlovy—Francin Yrgen von Karlovy. He's the devil of the lot. He's insane. He's power-mad. Doctor Graymaster told me about him. I can see what happened now, all right. They came here to grab the old man's formula, and Ross got shot. If there were two others, it can only mean that they've kidnaped the Doctor and his niece and have taken them out to that damned country place—to torture them, maybe. Listen, you've got to hunt them down. You've got to save them! You've simply got to believe me—you've got to!"

They were staring at him. Cornell's eyes were full of disbelief and cold suspicion. Hartswell had had a faintly mocking look in his glance since he had come in, but a frown of surprise had been growing as Bentley talked. As for the others, they wore the habitual expression of impassiveness so carefully studied by the police. Fancy stories were nothing new to them.

But Hartswell broke into the tale.

"Kid, I apologize—you did have a story—if it's even half true."

"It's true, all right. I couldn't say anything before, because I—"

"All right, you two, forget it!" This was Cornell, wearing a frown. "Never mind what you think now. And listen, Destiny, you're a pretty smooth number, I know. The police have had you on their mind for a long time. I'd like to get something on you right, and I don't mind admitting it. You're too damned smart for your health. You're a phony. I don't know just how you're phony, but you are. And it looks like you've stuck

yourself with a fast one this time. Personally, I don't believe a damned word of all this, see? And even if it's half true, it's not my job. It's a Federal job, see? Now let me get this yarn of yours straight! You're trying to give us the idea that old Graymaster invented some electric-light gadget that could blind a man for a while, hey? Right?"

"That's right." Bentley nodded.

"And when he offered it to the Army, they turned him down?"

"Yes. They—"

"Never mind. And when Washington turned it down, you say these Carpathian bohunks offered a million for it, and Graymaster refused it?"

"He refused it because he wanted America to—"

"To hell with that. It's phony, right there. Nobody ever refused a million dollars for anything. You can't make me—"

"But it's true," Bentley insisted. "I know it sounds crazy, but every word is true. And when Graymaster refused to sell his formula, they tried to steal it—they even tried to kill him. Listen, you remember when somebody took a pot-shot at me out of the windows of the Washington Towers? All the cops in the city were trying to make me give them the dope about it, but I couldn't, because—"

"Just a minute!" This was Hartswell breaking in. "Hold on, Cornell. You're off on the wrong track. In the first place, I can assure you that this kid has really got something there. I think he's telling a straight story, no matter how screwy it seems. Because I've had reporters practically shadowing the Graymaster girl for a long time now; and believe me, she has been acting pretty queer. And what Destiny just told us puts some real sense in a lot of things. Not only that, but young Destiny promised me a hot story which he said would break one of these days, and this looks like the story. I think you're wrong not to give him the benefit of the doubt. Remember this, Cornell: if even half what he's just told us is true, we can't afford to miss a trick. If there is a bunch of spies working in the country, it's the police's job to grab them—"

"You gonna tell me my job?" Cornell was bristling.

"You're damned right I am," Hartswell came back. "You're the Homicide Bureau, Cornell; but your real job is to prevent crime—not only to solve it. If

the lad's story is true, then this murder is only a beginning, likely. If those gorillas have snatched Graymaster and his niece, you may have two more murders to solve any minute now. Your job is to find out where they are, those two."

"Oh, yeah? Just like that, hey? Now, listen here: you newspaper guys can't run the Police Department—"

"That's what you think. The *Chronicle* is the strongest Democratic paper in the city, Cornell. Maybe you don't know how much the Commissioner appreciates the backing that the *Chronicle* gave him last election. Maybe I could tell the Commissioner a little story—along with a few facts I know and haven't had a chance to tell you yet." He shrugged. Cornell caught on rapidly, and was visibly affected by this veiled threat.

"Okay, so you've been holding out?" he said, endeavoring to keep his skeptical attitude. "Maybe you can tell me, then, why I should take this boy's nutty story seriously?"

Hartswell nodded.

"I can, and I will. You can check the *Chronicle* files and see a story last February or March about the Graymaster dame dropping out of circulation somewhere, and then turning up again with a broken arm or something from an automobile accident. You can check the records of the Connecticut State police, and you'll see there was a car found smashed up on the Danbury-Middlevale road about then. If Destiny's story about this fellow Ross or Von Rossenisch grabbing the girl at the airport is true, then it *could* have been that she wrecked the car and got away. The car had a Connecticut license. That would place this country estate of the Carpathian madman out in Connecticut somewhere. If you cops are smart, you'll go after it. It's ten to one that the girl and the old man are being held out there right now—maybe being tortured. I may be wrong, but it *could* be like that; and if it is, that would make a lot of queer things fit together."

BENTLEY broke in here, and the anxiety in his voice was not to be mistaken for play-acting:

"That's where they are, I tell you. For God's sake, try to believe me! Arrest me, if you want to. Hold me, put me in jail or anything, but for the love of God, try to catch those devils before—before they do something that—"



Bentley hurled himself on the man, who dropped, limp.

Cornell was beginning to soften, but his secret vanity made him take it the hard way.

"You're damned right I'll hold you," he said. "After a phony yarn like yours, I wouldn't miss it. And if there *aint* something in it, by God, you'll have a charge of interfering with the police in line of duty."

"Tell you what I'll do, Cornell," Hartswell said suddenly. "Just to satisfy you. If you can trump up a charge against the boy now, arrest him. I'll go bail for him—the *Chronicle* will. That'll assure you he won't run out. But in the meantime, get going on that Connecticut idea. If the boy's lying, you've got him. If he's not, you'll not only prevent a crime, but you might catch those spies. That would be a pretty big job for you, Cornell. Of course, you'll have to call in the Federals and the Connecticut State police, but the

Chronicle could give you a pretty nice bit of praise if you handled the job. Things like that get promotions, Cornell."

That did it. Cornell did not exactly blush, for blushes did not grow on leathery faces like his. But there was a sort of glow of embarrassment on his face as the other lesser officers looked at him and then gave meaningful glances to each other. Still, he did not easily shift his position.

"To hell with the Federals and the Connecticut cops. I got enough drag to handle things in the country. Now listen: if you guys are trying to crowd me into making a damned fool of myself, I'll—Well, don't, that's all. Now listen, Destiny: I want that story all over again—want you to sign it as an official statement. Start in—I'm listening."

Bentley told the entire thing again, secretly amused at the new briskness of the detective, who had managed to satisfy the demands of his own dignity now, and was making his about-face of attitude seem a natural one by dint of an exaggerated businesslike manner. When the story was done and signed, Cornell turned to the other policemen.

"Well," he growled, "what are you waiting for? Call a wagon and get that stiff to the morgue. Hold it for me. Brummer, you're in charge from here on. I want to run down this Connecticut angle. Check the fingerprints against the files—all of 'em. Remember the name of this feller?" He indicated the dead man with a jerk of his thumb. "Ross—Peter Ross. Check all the Connecticut records. Run down all the Rosses in the State. And you, Murchis, trace every move the Graymasters have made during the last week. Report to Brummer. Get going, I say."

THE door opened at that point and admitted the officer who had been sent to check Bentley's dinner-time.

"I been to the Chink place, Lieutenant," he said, "and he had dinner there, all right. Three waiters and the hat-check girl all told me—"

"Sure, sure," Cornell broke in. "That's fine. Now you hang out at the morgue, O'Hare. We're sending this dead man down, and I don't want anybody trying to pry him loose."

"Huh? Say, nobody would—"

"Who told you to put in your two cents? You stay at the morgue, like I said." He was enjoying his own gruffness now, and he whirled on Hartswell:

"Take your boy friend out o' here, Hartswell. You're responsible. Better stand by. I'll need you tomorrow. Okay, both of you, on your way. Destiny, don't leave your hotel until my men come for you tomorrow. We're gonna take a ride into Connecticut—if your damned yarn is any good. And it better be good, don't forget it."

Bentley stared at him, astonished, a little excited, a little troubled, and very pleased.

"You mean—you mean you aren't arresting me? I thought Hartswell—"

"Nuts!" replied the detective succinctly. "Get out of here before I change my mind."

IT was not any of Cornell's men but the detective himself who called for Bentley shortly after ten the next morning.

"Hartswell's on the way down here," he said with no preliminaries at all. "We're taking a drive, son; your yarn begins to make some sense."

"You mean you—you did find something?"

"Sure did. We had luck. The State cops on the Danbury road chased a big car last night for speeding. They was doing better'n eighty or so, too. They trailed the car as far as Sharon, but they lost it in the mountains somewhere. Had a Connecticut license, too, but they checked that it turned out to be a duplicate—cardboard, painted and varnished, probably. That's an old gag. Anyhow, it's plenty suspicious. We know the car didn't get beyond Canaan, and probably not farther than Falls Village, on account the cops radioed the flash to a lot of patrols, and the roads were pretty well blocked. So that puts your comic-opera Archduke on some farm in the triangle that Routes 44, 199 and 41 make above Sharon. I been up all night workin' on this thing, son. We got the Connecticut cops on the job, and no car can get outa that territory without questioning."

"Gee!" said Bentley, impressed by the activity of the law. "That's swell."

"Yeah, but that aint all. There's a funny angle to it that might fit something you told about. They picked up a feller on the road, blind as a bat. They said his eyes looked like they been burned. He couldn't speak a word of English, or at least he didn't. Now I was wondering if it's possible that old Graymaster or the girl could have one of those damned lights with them, and if they tried to make a break by using it—"

Bentley leaped, at that.

"They could," he said. "Graymaster made a small hand-flash like that. I know because Lorraine—I mean Miss Graymaster—saved my life with it once. That was the time they jumped her uncle in the street, and I ran to help—"

HE went on to describe the incident and his subsequent awakening in his hotel with his eyes feeling half burned out.

"Luckily," he amended, "I didn't get the full flash, or I'd have been worse off. It takes six hours to recover, she said. And say, we'd better get going if we're going to see that blind man, because he might break away when the effect of the beam wears off. The cops don't know about that, of course."

Cornell nodded and would have said something, but the ringing of the telephone interrupted. It was the desk clerk announcing J. C. Hartswell's arrival, and it served as a signal for getting started. Cornell fairly jostled Bentley into his things, rushing him down the elevator, greeted the editor with a curt, preoccupied smile, and hustled them all out into the waiting car, where two armed police officers sat waiting.

The car shot from the curb, its siren screaming, and nosed around the corner into a crosstown street which would take them to a through highway, while the detective made a new announcement.

"Funny thing, Destiny," he said. "I had a lotta trouble making myself believe your crazy story, but I gotta admit it does stand up, all right. I been in touch with Washington this morning, see?"

"Washington?" That was Bentley and Hartswell in a gasping duet.

"Yeah, and I got it straight that Graymaster has been dickering with the War Department. They didn't tell me what it was about, but they know him, all right, and he's got something out in that Long Island City place of his that interests 'em plenty."

"Oh!" said Bentley, not quite clear as to words. "Oh, then we're on the right track, all right."

"Yeah; and say, you didn't tell me you was the old Doc's partner."

"Partner?" He had never quite used the word after his transaction with Lorraine's uncle. It didn't seem to fit, somehow. "Well," he said slowly, "it isn't really that. It's—well, sort of personal."

"Personal, huh?" said the policeman oddly. "That's what you think."

The speed laws are a secondary consideration for a police car on duty and in pursuit of criminals; hence it was shortly before noon that Cornell and his assistants, official and otherwise, reached Danbury, making directly for the State Police barracks just beyond the town limits on the national highway. There was already some activity there; and as they arrived, they saw no fewer than five squad-cars parked outside the captain's quarters, suggesting that things were already in process of happening. They were.

Captain Horatio Welk, ex-Marine of war days, was a man of action and of few words.

"Glad to see you, Cornell," he said, and nodded curtly to Hartswell and Bentley when they were named. "We've run into something over on Sharon Mountain—don't know exactly what. Might be your foreigners or it might not."

"What is it?" the New York officer demanded.

"Criminal and dangerous, anyhow. Two of my men snooped over a big estate up there which was empty until six months ago, when somebody rented it—man called Jones. Happened last night. Somebody fired point blank without warning—in the dark. Corporal Quinn's got a shoulder wound—from a thirty-eight, I judge. Private Munn didn't come back."

"God! Dead?"

"Don't know. They got separated in the dark after the shooting. Quinn came back because those were the orders, and because he wasn't able to do much else. I've got no proof that your babies are there—not even that the Jones place is in on it. Might have been tramps, bums, crooks on the lam—anything. We're going out there now and take 'em, that's all. Want to join us?"

CORNELL wanted to, but his sense of duty made him hesitate. It might be a wild-goose chase. Shooting it out with criminals has its points, but he had come for a definite purpose. He stated his case on that basis.

Welk shrugged. "You're right, of course. I said I can't prove this has anything to do with what we talked of over the phone last night. On the other hand, that car did disappear in that triangular slip of land between the three highways, and Sharon Mountain is most of that land. People don't take pot-shots at policemen unless they're scared, or have



All doubt vanished; this was the place!

something pretty big to hide. Another thing: this man Jones is a bit of a mystery. As far as we know, nobody's actually seen him. Since he came, there have been a lot of people on the estate from time to time, and also there have been several dilapidated farms taken on short-term leases by persons fairly obscure and equally mysterious. We paid little attention to that until last night, when we started adding things up. It isn't much to go on, I know, but it would be too bad if we landed the right parties, and you weren't in on it."

That did it, of course. Cornell made up his mind to join them. But he wanted one more vestige of implication that it would be in line of duty.

"How about that blind man you picked up? Still here?"

Welk's face froze into a grim smile.

"No," he said. "He's gone."

"Gone?"

Plainly, Welk was a little embarrassed.

"Dammit, he got away. He wasn't blind, after all. I admit I don't figure the thing at all, but that's the way it is. We had him in the sick bay, with the doors locked and poultices on his eyes. Sometime this morning he cut his way through the heavy wire across the window and lifted out a slice of glass pane after scoring it with a diamond ring. He grabbed one of our motorcycles and lit out. We heard him go, and we were after him in three minutes, but that machine is really fast and he was plenty handy with it—for a blind man."

"I'll be damned!" observed Cornell.

"**W**HAT time did you pick him up?" Bentley asked suddenly. "And just where?"

"Just off the New York border on Route 7, near the Housatonic—it was about midnight, too."

"And he got away early this morning?"

"A little before five."

Bentley was thoughtful a moment; then:

"That does it," he said. "Cornell, I told you it takes six hours for the effect of that—you know—to wear off. If your hunch was right, and the Graymasters had tried to make a break, and this fellow got the worst of it,—blind and all that,—then he might have been walking around for an hour or so before they caught him. And his eyes would be all right again before morning. Let's go and see what's on the Jones estate."

Welk showed his astonishment.

"What the hell is this—his eyes would be all right? You should have seen 'em, feller. They looked like red ants had been eating 'em."

"I did see them," said Bentley cryptically. "From the inside." He winked at Cornell.

THREE squad cars, the Captain's coupé and Cornell's machine got under way at full speed. They avoided the town of Sharon, and skirted the small mountain behind it until Welk designated a rocky, broken dirt road that seemed to parallel a swift trout-stream that tumbled down the mountain.

"This is a hell of a road," he said, "but it isn't likely to be guarded. We can get within half a mile of the house without being seen—if the cars will take it. We'll park on the crest of the mountain and move in on 'em on foot."

They ground up the mountainside in low gear, fighting boulders, tree-stumps and treacherous sand-slips for a solid half-hour. It was an uneventful passage.

Parking the various cars and concealing them as best they might, they scattered over a three-hundred-yard span. Bentley and Hartswell stayed with Cornell and his men, while the State troopers flung out a long broken line of advance. Puffing uphill for a quarter of a mile, they had not noticed the gathering of storm clouds or the gradually darkening of the sun, and a mountain rainstorm burst on them with a suddenness and a vigor that somewhat dampened the enthusiasm of the city men. Welk, however, and his troopers showed no signs of pausing, and there was nothing to do but push on. Lightning crashed all about them. Rain fell in torrents. In the wet, soggy murk that suddenly shut them all in, Bentley strayed from the others. It happened imperceptibly, unconsciously. One minute he had seen the silhouette of Hartswell against the blue shoulders of Cornell, both of them straining against the slop and the beat of water. Then suddenly they were gone. He called, not loudly. The roar of the rain drowned his voice.

"Well," he decided, with a wry grin, "looks as if I'll have to handle this alone. Might as well go on as go back, anyhow. All directions look alike."

Which was more prophetic than he suspected.

In those few staggering minutes of uphill, slipping, sloshing struggle, the world about him suddenly changed. The grassy,

thickly underbrushed mountain-side was transmuted, suddenly, into a lawn. He did not remember just when the lawn began, but a great flash of lightning made him cast down his eyes, and he saw he was standing on cropped grass. It was like a little park. Neat rows of trees made geometric figures in every direction. The rivulets at his feet faded and vanished. He walked on a bright green though very wet carpet.

And another thunderous clap revealed the house—right before him, as though tossed there by a weird magic, built by some fantastic genie, the slave of a lamp.

He dropped to his knees, and crouched behind an apple-tree, an insufficient but ready hiding-place.

"Hell's bells," he muttered, "in another minute I'd have walked right in the door—and in case it's the Archduke's joint, wouldn't that have been nice?"

Then he froze. A footstep sounded on gravel near him. The thunder roared. A flash of lightning across the yellow sky gave him a flash-perception of a dark figure just ahead of him through the foliage, and a bluestone gravel walk. And the thing that gleamed in the figure's hands could only be a gun.

He thanked God for the storm.

The man, whoever it was, was walking away from him and not toward him. Half crouching, Bentley could see him better now—a burly fellow in a black slicker, carrying what seemed to be a shotgun. He walked heavily toward the house, then made as if to about face, and Bentley dropped to his hands again as the man returned down the walk in his direction. A clump of rose-bushes, ill-kept and sprawling, gave him added cover; and from behind it he could see the man's feet trudging along in a measured, listless tread.

AT some distance and dulled by the rain, there came a short, muffled, explosive sound. The man tensed, turned. That, Bentley knew, was a shot. Then there was another, and still another. Suddenly the whole place seemed to roar with shooting. The sputter of a machine-gun sounded close by. Bullets whined through the air just over Bentley's head. He flattened on the ground, still keeping his eye on the feet ahead, which were behaving oddly on the gravel walk.

Feet can be expressive. These feet were. They turned, they pivoted, they started this way and then that. Indecision and confusion held them fast. It

was evident that the man, whoever he was, was torn between fear, desire to join in the distant shooting, and the knowledge of his orders, whatever they were, which kept him at his post. Now they were backing into the bushes of the lawn. Now they were walking backward toward Bentley; he could see the crouched body, the angular drapery of the rubber slicker, the shotgun in alert position.

Then, with a terrible crash, the lightning struck close by. A giant elm split, and its branches came crashing down. Flame seemed to cover it. Pungent smoke filled the air. The backing feet turned tail, so to speak, and rushed straight at Bentley.

The very heavens were shaking as the storm gods fought; and the watchman, or whatever he was, flung himself almost headlong at the base of the very tree where Bentley knelt in shelter.

A split-second for decision; then Bentley hurled himself on the man, striking upward with his knee in the truest football tradition. He heard flesh and bone crunch. The man dropped limp and lay like a log, very likely never knowing what had struck him nor whence it came. And when he fell, his guttural voice mumbled something that sounded like, "*Ach, Gott!*"

In a second Bentley had snatched the shotgun from the ground where it had fallen. In seconds more he had stripped the slicker from the fallen man and had slipped into it himself. There was no plan, no thought, no real intent behind his actions. There was only the sound of constant shooting in his ears, as though on the other side of the building a small war were going on.

And he hurled himself forward along the gravel walk.

Was the unconscious man one of those he had seen around the long table that day, long ago, when he had been taken blindfolded to the "court" of his One-eyed Highness? He could not tell.

"Anyhow," he thought as he ran, "there's something pretty wrong here. I'm going to make a try for the house."

IT was a big house, an enormous house—one of those ancient American houses that grow, over a hundred years or more, from a small colonial into a gigantic rambling affair of no contour or form, as wings and appendages are added. A narrow door gave onto the walk; and Bentley never thought of hesitation, but flung the door wide and dashed in.

He was in a kitchen. Running footsteps sounded on wood floors. Shots rang out above his head. The bark of service revolvers was distinct now. A bullet crashed through the glass of the window across the kitchen and shattered something behind him. Yet nobody was visible.

A door at the right seemed to give on the main house, and Bentley went through it, using more caution this time, and pausing as he went through to take his bearings and to conceal himself as best he might. Still no one was visible.

AND then a faint sense of familiarity came to him. Suddenly he knew the place. The great hall, the double staircase, the dark mahogany woodwork, the enormous frame door, the patterned wallpaper, all grew in his memory. This was the place! He had been led down those very stairs. He had been conducted through that very door. Inside that room, he knew, was a vast table at which eight bearded men had sat in a kind of judgment on him. All doubt vanished now. This was the place of the Archduke Karlov, the headquarters of his foreign agents and their maneuvers.

Commotion up the stairs. Running feet. Cries, exclamation, excitement. The *rat-tat-tat* of a machine-gun sounding outside, muffled a little through the walls. He knew that Welk's men were making their attack and were now at close quarters.

And out of that knowledge was born his flash of a thought: "*Lorraine!*"

The scuffling of feet and the shooting seemed to be fixed at the rear of the house, however, and the commotion at the head of the stairs had gone. Quietly Bentley crept up. Each step brought a creak from old wood, but the din of rain, shooting and bursts of thunder covered them up. And then, with that same feeling of sure knowledge, he was at the top and the place was in a sense his own.

There was, he knew, just a chance that the girl and her uncle were still alive. These men would kill, surely; but they wanted something, and they could not get it from dead people. And if they were alive, there was a strong probability that they might be in that same tight room in which he himself had awakened from unconsciousness.

But the room was not easily found. There were many doors along the corridor. At any instant one of the Carpathians might emerge into the hall and see

him and give warning. Even with a shot-gun, he could scarcely hope to fight them all. He crept forward. He strained his hazy memory to recollect the brief vision of the place as he had seen it before. And then he chose the third door on the left.

He reached it, turned the knob. It was locked fast inside. He shook it gently. It refused to yield. He stepped back and gathered himself to fling his body against the door, hoping the old lock might give. He did not dare to speak or call out a name. He knew, too, that should this be the wrong door—and why not?—almost certain death for him lay behind it. He crouched, tensed his muscles, lowered his shoulder—

"Best not to move," said a voice behind him. "Mr. Destiny, I believe. How quaint, how quixotic of you, my young friend!"

It was the voice of Karlovy, his One-eyed Highness.

In a thick, livid instant Bentley sensed crushing defeat. The fanatical European would be armed, of course. The distance to his voice could not have been more than twenty feet. He would be standing halfway up the stairs. In another instant he would call his men; and he, Bentley, would be a prisoner—or worse.

And Lorraine?

It was that thought which prompted his rash action.

He heard the soft tread of a foot on the stairs. Karlovy was coming up. And on a sudden fierce impulse, he flung his body to the floor, half turning it as he did so, and sweeping the muzzle of his shot-gun around in the same motion, pulling the trigger. The roar of the gun was tremendous, deafening. The recoil jerked it from his hands, cruelly wrenching his fingers in the trigger guard. And in the same split-second something struck him on the forehead, sending him crashing into black insensibility with the roar of loosened hell sounding in his ears.

WHEN Bentley drifted back into consciousness again, nothing seemed certain at all. Nothing, that is, except the terrible quiet, which was shockingly in contrast with the chatter of machine-guns, the roar of his own exploding shot-gun, the yells of hidden men and the sound of running feet. The quiet was rather ghastly, a little depressing.

Finally he forced his eyes open, and pushed with his hands to brace himself into a sitting position. He was in a room. He was on a couch or a sofa or something

similar. The room was like twilight, dim and vague, but there was something faintly familiar about it. He got himself sitting upright now, and it cost him a groan. Then an angel spoke:

"Oh," she said. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

And curiously, the angel's voice became the voice of Lorraine Graymaster.

"They'll be here in a few minutes now," she was saying. "Please lie down again. Does it hurt very much?"

Then he saw her; she was sitting across the room in a chair, and looking at him.

"Ah-h-h-h!" he groaned breathlessly, moving his body a little to see her better. "Hello. . . . Hello, Lorraine. . . . I'm all right, I guess, but how—what is—where is that devil of a—" And then she was beside him, pushing him back on the couch, and saying:

"Please—please lie back. They'll be here with an ambulance any minute now. Everything's all right—and—and I wanted to stay, and—well, I had to thank you, didn't I?"

The touch of her hand was soft and kind and soothing. It was all too queer. He couldn't help asking her:

"Where are we? What happened? Where's Hartswell and Cornell and the others? Did somebody get that crazy bohunk of a Karlovy? Ah-h-h! What's the matter with my head?"

THOUGH it took a little time, she managed to answer all those and more. She sat down beside him on the couch and told him, one by one, most of the things that puzzled him.

It had been Cornell himself who had found Bentley, lying at the head of the stairs with a scalp wound on his head where Karlovy's bullet had creased him. They didn't know much about what had killed Karlovy; but they found his body torn as if by the close-quarters blast of a shotgun; and they found the gun flung some distance down the hall. It seemed miraculous, but Bentley managed to figure that one out as Lorraine spoke. Obviously the man had raised his head above the stairs to shoot at Bentley just in time to get the discharge in his face.

It seemed simple enough as Lorraine told it. Cornell's men, with Welk's troopers, had little trouble after they tossed in a few gas-bombs and turned loose the Tommy guns. Leaderless, with their Archduke dead, and caught unprepared, they gave up quickly.

As for Lorraine and her uncle, she said that Ross and his men had been waiting

for them in the apartment when they returned from dining out, it being the servants' day off. The Doctor had managed to fire one shot from the pistol he always carried with him these days, and Ross had been killed. The others, however, had forced them down the enclosed fire-escape and into a waiting car. Hands tied and all, Lorraine had worked for almost two hours to wriggle the deadly little flashlight out of her silk hand-bag. And when the car had stopped on the road at the hail of a man who might have been a sentry, she had been able to turn one single flash out into the road. Hence the "blind" man. But they overpowered her and took her flash away, and kept them both in the house while the mad Archduke was working up rage enough either to starve them or to torture them into giving up the formula.

"They didn't really hurt us," she said. "But it wouldn't have been long before— And then, when we were just about decided to give up, the shooting started," she went on. "I'd no idea you were here, but when they brought you in here with some other wounded people, I—oh, don't you see? I'm so ashamed that I didn't trust you—that I didn't believe—"

She was a little hysterical, plainly. Bentley managed a faint smile.

"Forget it," he murmured. "I guess we were doomed to be always running into each other under the darnedest conditions. Besides I—well, I sort of think you are good for me, Miss Graymaster. I'd hate to—to lose you."

Her soft hand was at his head again.

"You don't have to lose me, really," she said, but that was ambiguous. He made it more specific.

"You're darned right I don't," he said. "Once I was afraid of you, because, well you're—idle rich—"

"Not idle."

"I guess not, at that. But rich. Anyhow, you made me so mad that I'm going to be a millionaire before long. I think I could support you in the style to which I'd like to become accustomed."

"Then you aren't still—mad?"

"Not in that sense of the word."

She gave him both hands, then. The sound of motors outside announced the return of the police with an ambulance.

(THE following are selections from the notes, jottings and diary-like scribbings which Bentley found time to set down as a basis for the series of articles, later published by the New York Chron-

icle, which are now famous under the title of "Stranger than Fiction or How I Lived a Book." The writer has chosen this method of presenting the concluding phases of this history in the belief that Bentley Dewert's own words, untouched by the swift blue-pencil of Editor Hartswell and written, so to speak, as from self to self, will reflect the human factor which, try as he may, no mere historian can supply in a true sense. Or so we believe.)

April 15:

This has been a bad day, when it ought to have been one of the happiest in my life. The queer part of it is that while I didn't mind being "notorious" at all, because I felt the fun of kidding the newspapers and practically everybody (including myself, perhaps) by playing John J. Destiny and the "White Knight," I don't much relish this suddenly being "famous." Hartswell did it, of course. Trust him to play up his scoop and to get the jump on the *Ledger* even at my expense. Naturally, he would have to print the whole story of Dr. Graymaster's blinding ray and the business about the Carpathian Union and their espionage; but in doing it he has played up (and trumped up, too) a lot of empty heroics for my part in the thing, and that just makes me sick. Imagine a headline like:

WHITE KNIGHT A REAL HERO NOW: MAY
WED. HELPS COPS, SHOOTS SPY, RESCUES
DAMSEL, ALL IN ONE BELIEVE-IT-OR-NOT
AFTERNOON

And the net result of that, of course, is to bring every reporter in the city to my rooms, all yelling for inside dope and especially bothering me about Lorraine. Poor Lorraine, she is in a difficult spot too, thanks to Hartswell's walking in on us at the Connecticut place, and refusing to believe that the private business of a man and woman is no concern of the public's. I wish it were true that "New York's Number One Mystery Man May Marry Graymaster Heiress," as the papers reported it. I also wish I could stop being a mystery man and be just Bentley Dewert for a while. Sooner or later I've got to tell Lorraine the truth—all of it. I don't suppose she'll even believe it. I wouldn't myself, if I hadn't lived it.

April 18:

The ironical side of all this newspaper publicity is that now, when I can't touch anything, half the city is trooping to the



hotel and offering me chances to make millions of dollars. Caddis has offered a partnership in his firm, asking me to invest only "a couple o' hundred grand." A man named Myron B. Sellert who is a big shot in Wall Street, wants to use my name on his door-sign and give me, in return, a seat on the Exchange after the first year. Thus far he hasn't mentioned anything about my investment, but it would be sure to come up sooner or later. Senator Pinkton has telephoned twice from Washington, still urging me to take that job running his Pinkwater outfit. I'd like to take it, too, but I have other plans. And the most startling of all is Leverford of New World Fuels, who wants me to take over some foreign propaganda office for their combine, and insists that I am the only man in the world with "cold brass enough" to swing it.

But I can't take any of these, of course. In the first place, my actual cash-on-hand balance is a little less than a thousand dollars, and I haven't paid the hotel for two months. Everything will be all right enough if the Chinese population of America doesn't let me down. If they do—it's curtains for John J. Destiny. If they come across, I'll be "in"—at least to the tune of six hundred thousand dollars or so. The catch is that I have not only to *live* until June 15 on what I have, before I'll even know whether I'll be a sucker or a millionaire, but I have to live like John J. Destiny, and you can't live like a millionaire playboy on a few hundred dollars. Or can you? I'll find out!

April 22:

Saw Brood today. He ran true to form. He let me talk along like a child telling

Bentley managed a faint smile. "I'd hate to—to lose you, Miss Graymaster," he murmured. "You don't have to lose me, really," she said.

tales out of school, and then he exploded and pounced on me with:

"You're a damn' fool, boy! You're a numbskull and a scatterbrain. You pull a clever thing like that Chinese business one day, and the very next day you get yourself into a mess with a woman. A woman, that's what. Don't care if she's the Queen of Sheba or the daughter of Cræsus, you haven't time for women—not when you work for me, boy. And you're still working for me, remember that. Maybe you're a hero now. Maybe you think you've recouped all your losses with this Chinese business, and you're sitting pretty to make that million. But that's all right, you're still working for Ephraim Brood. I've got the right to take every penny away from you, boy. Don't forget it."

He went on with a lot more of that, too; and when I tried to tell him that I wasn't in a "mess with women," and that Lorraine was really responsible for my coming out of the dumps and trying again, he only shouted and roared some more. But when I got mad and started to walk out on him, he quieted down.

"You listen, boy," he said; and I could see he was worried about me. "Now you listen to me: We've got to make this thing work. I've got a book to write, boy. I've got to prove Personal Mystery.

It's the last thing and the biggest thing in my life, boy. You can't let me down now."

I told him I wasn't letting him down, but I was pretty mad. I told him that maybe he did own my body and my brain, if any, during the life of his contract, but he didn't own my heart. I told him that Lorraine had been shuffled into my life so many times that it was just fate, and that indirectly she was responsible for my getting that fifty thousand dollars away from the Carpathian Union that time. I guess I told him a lot, too—maybe too much. Because all of a sudden he grew quiet and sentimental—I never suspected old Brood of having a sentimental side. He said:

"All right, boy, if you're in love, I can't stop you. But if that girl is worth a damn, she wouldn't want you to lose that million—not for the money's sake, but because of what it really means." And then he muttered things to himself that sounded like: "Damned young puppy—falling in love!"

Suddenly he whirled on me and said:

"All right, suppose you do get this six hundred thousand dollars. Suppose the Chinamen pay you back the four million and the twenty-five per cent, and you pay back your lenders with ten per cent. Six hundred thousand isn't a million. What are you going to do about the rest of it? Hang around in night-clubs and gas with reporters the way you're doing?"

He had me there, of course; for I just don't know the answer to that one. So I told him:

"No sir. I'll find a way—with Personal Mystery—to make another four hundred thousand. After all, I've got several months left, haven't I? And I have to hang around night-clubs to keep up the Personal Mystery of making everybody think I've got money. That's all, Mr. Brood."

Of course he snorted, but he understood. And when I left him, I knew he was right and I was wrong, because after all, you can't stretch six hundred thousand dollars into a million by just thinking about it. Not even with Personal Mystery.

May 5:

Another embarrassing day. Yesterday it was Julius Hartlow who had his secretary call me and ask me to come down to his office. I was puzzled at first, but I remembered Hartlow's letter reminding me that he actually owes me sixty thou-

sand dollars for that original airplane deal. It might be about that, I fancied. But I was wrong. He treated me with his distant charm and remote politeness, and made me sit in his private office and closed the door and dismissed his secretary. Then he said:

"I think it is only fair to ask you for news of our—ah—investment, Mr. Destiny." What could I say? The more I talked, the more I would show my hand; and if Hartlow ever guessed that I had used his money on something that was no more than a wild gamble, on the word of a Chink named Abraham Lincoln Soo, he would have me slapped into jail as an embezzler—which I may be yet, of course. So I said practically nothing for an hour or so. Mostly: "I am not able to talk just yet, Mr. Hartlow, but if you read the papers carefully about the Sino-Japanese question, you will know almost as much as I do—until June 15th. That is the day of profit, sir. We can only wait."

It didn't work very well, but he must have reasoned that he could jail me just as well in a month as he can now, so I got away with it.

But today I had Jo Caddis on my neck, and Jo is not the man to beat around the bush. He came storming into the hotel and established himself at the bar downstairs—after, I think, having made previous bar-stops. He had me summoned by page-boy, telephone and again by phone five minutes later. When I came down, he started in with:

"Hya, hero? Say listen, son, I aint heard a word outa you since I handed you a lot of dough for you to play Ponzi with. Now how about it? I gotta right to know, aint I, whether or not I'm gonna get it back, and when, and how much? So start talkin' pretty."

I tried to handle him the way I did Hartlow but it was no go. The whisky in him yelled:

"You wouldn't kid old Jo Caddis, son, wouldja? You gotta know somethin' if you gotta million bucks layin' out in this Chink investment. An' if you don't know somethin', then you're a liar by the clock and you're a dirty crook besides, that's what you are. Remember, son, I was workin' swindles when you was hangin' on your daddy's gate, and I aint gonna let you get away with it. Now where's that coin? I wanna see some sign of it."

I didn't feel comfortable. I told him substantially the truth, though. I told him that part of the risk was that we all had to take the Chinese association's

word for it and that I couldn't ask questions; that if I was satisfied, he ought to be, and that under my agreement with him and the others I didn't have to tell him a thing as long as I produced his capital and interest by June 15. And I added that if he didn't like that he could jump in the lake, which was sheer brava-do that I didn't feel. By that time, luckily, the whisky had begun to develop in him and he lost interest and we drifted onto other subjects. And when I finally called a taxicab for Jo and sent him home, rather foggy but still standing, he was mumbling something about Chinamen in general and me in particular which I preferred not to question or examine.

May 5:

The day which will decide whether I am to be the living proof of Personal Mystery (or at least have a chance to be it), or just the king-pin in another Ponzi scandal, is still more than a month off, but the suspense of waiting for something to happen is getting me down. My capital, so called, is now reduced to less than eight hundred dollars and my bills around the hot spots where I am still forced to appear to keep up pretenses, are running to more than three hundred dollars. Fortunately Lorraine has been away in Tuxedo for several days visiting Mrs. Fermat, and cannot see the worry and trouble which, I am sure, must show in everything I do or say.

May 18:

I could not stand the suspense any longer this morning and I forced myself to go to the Celestial restaurant at noon, intending to ask for Mr. Soo and get some information as to what was happening. I found the place closed, and with a large auction-sale placard tacked across the door.

May 22:

My letter to Mr. Abraham Lincoln Soo, at the university, was returned today with the inscription: "*Vacation; address unknown.*" At the offices of the Chinese American *Weekly*, I was told by a dour Oriental that Mr. Hamilton Meng, the editor, "Not here, sair, no sair, he not here." At the Transpacific Import Company offices in New York, I learned that Mr. Chung, the president, only visits the Eastern branch once a year and that he is available in San Francisco only between trips to China. I have not, as yet, worked up the courage to try the Sino-American Bank and ask for Lin Fu-Kai. If I have

let myself be swindled again,—this time on a scale that makes the Kelsdro brothers look like pikers,—I'd rather not know it in advance. On top of all this, I have a letter from Senator Pinkton still urging me to take his manager-job, but adding a careful reference to "our investment," which shows that even he is concerned over my silence.

May 28:

Nothing but bad news, evil signs and omens. The newspapers are filled with news on the Sino-Japanese struggle. Tientsin is blockaded. The Yangtse is now under Jap control. The Chinese government is being chased from town to town, as the Japs are endeavoring to destroy every successive capital with their bombardments. The "noble resistance" of China is weakening. Guerrilla warfare is replacing the pitiful attempts of a badly trained and ill-equipped Chinese army to confront the Rising Sun on equal terms. According to the press, only a handful of airplanes remain in Chinese control, all piloted by foreigners. While it seems unlikely that a complete capitulation of China is near, all opinions concede Japan has the situation in hand and that the end is only a matter of time.

And on top of all this comes the rumor, published by several papers, to the effect that a "certain European power" (Germany or Italy seems indicated) has disposed of a fleet of twenty small undersea craft to Japan. These are three-thousand-ton subs capable of operating in the river waterways although considered too light for effective naval warfare on the high seas and therefore released to Japan at bargain prices. I don't know what to make of this, in the light of what those Chinamen told me. Does it mean that China was unable to buy her subs after all? Or that they changed their plans? Or that they never even got "my" four million, and that Abraham Lincoln Soo was just another smooth confidence-man taking me in on a gigantic variation of the rosary game?

Jo Caddis on the telephone tonight: "Looka here, son, I can read the papers. Where's your damn' Chinese army now? Maybe I was tight the other day, but I aint now. If you're pulling a fast one, you might start in getting your cards printed with a new address. . . . Pick your own prison."

May 31:

Lorraine returned from Tuxedo today but I have scarcely seen or spoken to her,



"The young feller made millions for me," said Senator Pinkton.

because Dr. Graymaster has been monopolizing my time. Tomorrow is his big day. The U. S. Army technicians will witness his first official demonstration of the blinding light-beam. The Doctor still insists that I am his partner, and that should he succeed in getting the Government to accept his device, it is all due to the hundred thousand dollars I loaned him. Absurd, of course; but in spite of his gruff, sarcastic ways and his eccentricities, the old man is pretty decent.

June 2:

Something is developing for Dr. Graymaster. He was called to Washington yesterday evening and has taken Lorraine with him, but he refused to tell me just how the tests came out. From his attitude I'm afraid something is wrong. Lorraine promises to write me at once and let me know. I have a sense of depression and doom and failure. I have tried to solace myself in the thought that it doesn't *really* matter—to me, Bentley Dewert—whether or not Personal Mystery gets proved or not, or even whether I lose all my money and even go to jail. Because the real *me* hasn't done anything dishonorable or wrong. But all that is no good. It doesn't work.

June 4:

No letter from Lorraine as yet.

June 5:

Something is happening in Washington, but Lorraine writes nothing about it.

Important General Staff officers have been called to the Capital for a conference. The newspapers are full of speculation as to what "drastic changes in our military set-up" are being contemplated. And all that is just an added note to the feeling of uncertainty and trouble that is making me sick with worry.

June 10:

Big news. Or perhaps so. The newspaper carry a story from Hongkong that reads, in general:

CATASTROPHE IN YOKOHAMA CRIPPLES
JAP WARSHIP: RUMOR UNCONFIRMED
DUE TO CENSORSHIP OF CABLES

June 11:

I have spent all day on the telephone answering three simple words to three hundred questions about the Japanese fleet. The words are: "I don't know." The questions come from Caddis and Mr. Hartlow and the others. The newspapers have got more details on the Yokohama explosion. The blast, according to the Kvass Agency story, was caused by a high explosive detonated by some agency and timed to perfection. Speculation by the papers suggests a mine, a torpedo or a hundred other things, but one paper holds out for an "unidentified submarine."

Thus far no paper has actually mentioned China in connection with the explosion, but it is plain that that is what they mean. It is thought that more than one warship was destroyed, as owing to censorship, losses are always minimized.

June 12:

Word from Lorraine at last, but not much word. A telegram reading:

IMPOSSIBLE WRITE YOU NOW STOP RETURN JUNE 20. LOVE.

LORRAINE

June 14, ten a. m.:

Mr. Branch of the Sphinx National telephoned me just now. He said:

"Will it be possible for you to come down to the bank at once, Mr. Destiny? Something most important, sir."

I feared the worst, knowing the state of my capital, and I asked him if it was bad news. He almost gasped.

"Bad news? No indeed, sir. I should say not, sir. Quite impossible to discuss over the phone. Shall I expect you?"

So I am on my way.

(Seven p. m.)

I haven't got over it yet. What Mr. Branch telephoned me about is a draft on the Franco-Oriental Export Bank for one

million dollars. It was presented to be deposited to my account by an unknown individual, and it was immediately handed to the cashier for question. By the time I arrived, two more such drafts had been handed through a teller's window, one on the Sino-American bank for two and a half millions of dollars and the other on the Banque de Chine (Paris) for a million and one-half. The last was a cable draft. The cashier was in a dither. So was I. But I tried to act as though it were the most natural thing in the world to receive five million dollars in a few hours.

When Branch wanted to know what disposition I would make of the money. I astonished him by writing out checks to Hartlow, Pinkton and Leverford for their million each, and instructing the bank to have the amounts deposited in those names. I think I acted almost too casually. Branch didn't believe me. Neither did I! As for Jo Caddis, I couldn't resist paying him back in his own coin. I had the bank buy six thousand shares of Norfolk, Reyford and Eastern at market and have them transferred to Jo. The catch is, the market on N. R. & E. has fallen and the stock is worth about four hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Of course I'll make the rest good—but it will be fun to hear Jo howl.

So that leaves a million on deposit in my own account (not counting the reserve for Jo's depreciated stocks, which I really owe him) and those ten-per-cent interest checks will come due June 15, which is tomorrow, leaving me my net of six hundred thousand dollars. Not bad, Dewert. Not bad. But the credit goes to old Brood—and to Lorraine.

(The story of Bentley Dewert is resumed at this point by the historian, since, due to subsequent incidents and circumstances, Bentley's notes are too fragmentary to be informative.)

PRIDE, it is said, goeth before destruction. On that morning of June 16 Bentley stood, exuberant, in front of his mirror, blithely saluting his own reflection and saying:

"Hi there, young Destiny. They can't get us down, boy! They can't beat us now. Here's lookin' at you, boy! Now bring on your miracles. The tougher they are, the better we like 'em."

That was June 16, and pride was running high. Pardonable pride, and small blame to Bentley; yet the fall was not far off.



"Destiny, I've got you to thank for that subsidy," said Dr. Graymaster.

"Let's go, Kid Destiny," he said loudly and with a parting flourish of his hand at the mirror. "Let's find a couple more worlds to conquer."

And he marched down the hall to the elevator.

It began that way, but it grew even worse. In the hotel lobby the desk-clerk signaled him and waved an envelope.

"This just came, sir," he said. "I was just going to send it up."

Bentley nodded and took the letter. It bore the insignia of a well-known aircraft corporation in the upper left-hand corner.

"Ha!" he said as he ripped it open. "I knew this was a good day. Hartlow probably comes through with his promise."

He was right. For the folded letter contained a check, and the brief but explanatory note:

Dear Sir:

Enclosed is our check for \$60,000, covering commissions due you on a transaction whose origin and purpose you will remember.

You are advised that the depositing of this check will be tantamount to an acknowledgment on your part that Hartlow-Morgan is acquitted herewith of all obligations.

Julius Hartlow, President

Stiff, formal, unbending and bristling with calm dignity—that was Hartlow. Bentley smiled as he thrust the check into his pocket.

"There," he muttered, "is a cold-blooded member for you. If that's the way to be a millionaire, I'd a lot rather keep on with Personal Mystery. Wonder if those aristocrats of finance ever have any fun." Then he added under his breath as he walked out of the hotel:

"Okay, Mr. Hartlow. I'm going to deposit what is tantamount to anything you like, in about half an hour. I can use that sixty thousand right now."

And he hailed a taxicab.

THE offices of J. Caddis, Promotions, had grown to be a familiar landmark to Bentley during the months of his adventures under the ægis of Ephraim Brood; and yet always, when being announced to the burly presence of Pyramid Jo, he had sensed a little feeling of ill-ease. Caddis was a man of positive action and more positive opinions. A rough, tough customer, Jo Caddis. Today, however, as Bentley gave his name to the receptionist, he felt he had the upper hand over Jo, and the grin on his face bore witness to his satisfaction.

"Mr. Caddis is—well, a little on the rampage this morning," the young woman told him. "Perhaps if you wait a little while, sir—" It was well intended, this warning, but it did not deter this Young Lochinvar of Personal Mystery today.

"Thanks," he said. "But I can't wait this morning. Just tell him John Destiny's on the way in."

The girl stared at him strangely.

"Very well, sir."

And Bentley walked down the hall to Jo's private office.

"Rampage, eh?" he mused as he went through. "I'll bet he's just burned up. This is going to be fun."

Caddis met him at the door with a scowl and a loud:

"So you had the nerve to come down here, didja, son? Well, it's lucky you did, on account I was gettin' madder and madder."

"Hello, Jo," offered Bentley easily. "What's eating you?"

"Eating me, is it?" The cigar vibrated in the promoter's mouth. "Eating me, hey? Now you listen here, Mr. Smart Alec Destiny: I was gonna smack an attachment on your bank-accounts. I was gonna get me some law. I was gonna make you, like the judge says, show cause why you think you can gyp poor old Jo Caddis outa four hunnert an' fifty grand. Now how do you like them apples, son?"

"I'm sure," said Bentley with affected nonchalance, "I can't imagine what you're talking about. You seem to be a little on edge this morning, Jo. Well, here's what I came down for—" He tossed a sealed envelope on the financial man's desk. "I'll run along now. See you sometime when you feel better about life, Jo. Pip-pip!"

He turned on his heel and walked straight out of Jo's office, averting his head so that the broad grin on his face might not be seen.

Caddis exploded. Caddis liked a good hot argument, and this cool indifference maddened him.

"Hey, come back here, you," he roared when he had recovered his voice. "Come back here while I tell you which is in the swindle business, you or me."

But the smart Mr. John Destiny had already gone out of the front door.

Jo perspired. It is not easy for a man of his bulk and spleen to restrain anger. He perspired, and slumped into his seat at his desk, muttering profanely, while his fingers ripped open the envelope Bentley had flung at him. . . .

"Jeepers creepers!"

His eyes were staring so hard at what he drew from the letter that they fairly popped from his head. "Jeepers creepers, now I ask you, somebody's a dumb bunny around here. And maybe it's me and not him—or is it?"

For what he had in his hand was Bentley's check for four hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

"*Dear Caddis,*" said the note attached. "*This belongs to you. Hope my harmless funning didn't upset you too greatly, but here is one man who doesn't need money so bad he would make it the way you do. J. Destiny.*"

"JEEPERS creepers!" rumbled Jo Caddis again. "Now, I ask you?" And he sat there staring at the letter for long silent minutes. Then he yelled out:

"Frank!" and after a moment: "Frank, you get in here quick."

The assistant named Frank put in an uncertain head at the door.

"Yes sir, Mr. Caddis."

"Siddown—I want to ask you something."

"Yes sir." Frank took a chair, gingerly. He was not accustomed to be consulted by Pyramid Jo Caddis.

"Now you listen here, Frank," said Jo, puffing ruminatively on his stogie. "You been workin' for me a long time,

now. You oughter know what kind of a guy is this Jo Caddis. I want you should tell me straight, is he a right guy?"

FRANK squirmed. This was not a conversation to his liking. The wolf does not ordinarily ask the lamb if he is a gentle beast.

"Why—why, yes, of course, sir," he said hypocritically.

"Yeah? But would you say I got a lot of what you call it, ethics?"

"Ethics, sir? You mean moral principles?"

"Yeah, that's it. You think I'm long on ethics?"

"Why—I think you are as ethical as anybody—in this business, sir. A smart business man, I'd call you."

"Stick to ethics, Frank. Me, I aint had no time for ethics—I been too busy tryin' to make a coupla bucks. Now you tell me what it is, an ethic? Me, I wouldn't know one if it bit me in the back."

"Oh," said Frank, a little sanctimoniously, "ethics means playing square, sir. It means not taking advantage of people when they can't help themselves, sir. It means—well, it means returning good for evil, and giving everybody a chance. But I'm afraid business isn't very ethical, sir—a business like yours, sir. You have to be smart—"

"Yeah?" Jo was pensive. He seemed to study the tip of his cigar. "So if a feller which I pulled a smart one on gets a chance to gyp me out o' some dough, only he doesn't do it, then that feller is ethical, hey?"

"According to Christian principles, sir. But I don't think many people are like that, sir—not in Wall Street."

"Hm-m!" was Jo's comment. "H-m-m! But it might make a feller feel pretty good inside, knowin' he might have gyped somebody, only he didn't."

"You mean a clear conscience, sir?"

"Yeah, that's it. A feller can maybe know he's smart, only he don't have to do anything about it, see what I mean? Maybe you see your chances. Maybe you see somebody is a dumb bunny and a pushover and a sucker. That's bein' smart, aint it? Only, if you don't take advantage of the sucker, that's still smart, only it's ethics, aint it?"

"I think I see what you mean, sir," said Frank, now totally baffled by the conversation. "I guess that would be most ethical. But not very practical, I'm afraid, sir."

"Practical, hell," said Jo, snorting a little. "For twenty-five years I been practical, Frank," he went on, a little excited now. "I never give a sucker an even break. I never passed up a chance to grab a nickel when a sap left it layin' around. I got plenty money now, Frank. Only, sometimes I get to wonderin' what for I got it. Maybe if I was to get me some ethics, hey? Maybe I been too smart. Maybe I oughter go fifty-fifty with a feller that could 'a' gypped me, only he didn't. Maybe I get a good feelin' inside sometimes, like he's maybe got it."

His voice fell away into silent meditation, while Frank stared at his employer as though wondering whether or not he had suddenly been taken ill. Then Jo sat up stiffly, striking his desk with his big hand.

"That's it, Frank. We gotta get it some ethics. Now you go write out a check, see? You write out a check for two hunnert an' twenty-five grand. You make it out to John J. Destiny. You bring it here, an' I'll sign it. . . . Well, what are you waitin' for? Get me that check before I change my mind."

A SURPRISE awaited Bentley on his return to the hotel. A messenger had brought a note from—of all unexpected persons—Dr. Buntsman Graymaster, in which the old gentleman stated that he had returned from Washington by airplane that morning, and that Lorraine would follow by train the next day. The Doctor, furthermore, asked Bentley to join him at dinner in the Hippocrates Club, an exclusive gathering-place for medical men and scientists. "*I want to take this opportunity to talk over certain matters and get it over with.*"

So stated the letter in language which was typical of the terse, dry octogenarian.

Bentley's first thrill at the prospect of seeing Lorraine two days earlier than expected was a little dampened in the anticipation of talking over "certain matters" with her uncle and guardian. Dr. Graymaster was pleasant, of course, and a man to be admired—"really a likable fellow," Bentley told himself, but the "certain matters" would be his plans to marry Lorraine, he felt sure; and no young man looks forward to such a conversation with any real zest.

However, this was Bentley's day. The exuberant spirits which filled him in the morning were able to give him the courage needed to face a thousand uncles.

He arrived at the club promptly. He was conducted by a page-boy to a small room on the third floor of the famous building where the aged Doctor awaited him, seated at a table upon which was set, not food at all, but a considerable array of books, papers and the paraphernalia of a man engaged in thoughts of business.

"How do, young fellow," said the Doctor, getting up and extending a lean claw-like hand. "Glad you came. Now let's get down to cases."

HE was not as difficult as Bentley had imagined. He was blunt and direct. "Cases," of course, would be his niece and the possibility of her marriage.

But the Doctor surprised him.

"First thing," he said, "is that hundred thousand dollars I borrowed from you some months ago. Probably you've wondered about it. I haven't made any sign of paying it, up to now."

To say that Bentley had actually forgotten the money would be inexact. One does not forget a hundred thousand dollars. But that he had put it aside in his mind as a thing very special—very sensitive, very remote and intermingled with the hazy, nebulous aura that surrounded all of his thoughts of Lorraine—is not less than the truth.

"Why—why—I hadn't thought about it. I—well, you see, sir, I—"

"Never mind that," crackled the Doctor's dry voice. "Money's money. Debts are debts. Man that doesn't remember about money's a fool. I pay my debts. I'm paying you now, young fellow."

"Well, I—of course, if you put it that way, sir—"

"I do put it that way," the Doctor said emphatically. "Besides, I owe you something more than that. My business in Washington was satisfactory. Things are happening. The Government is buying that carbon-light formula. I'm getting a subsidy to build the proper plant to manufacture on a scale large enough for our army's use. And I've got you to thank for it."

"Oh," said Bentley, endeavoring to be casual and to dismiss his services in the matter as scarcely worth the mention, "if it hadn't been me, it would have been somebody else, sir. I'm glad, of course if—"

"Don't you believe it," snapped the Doctor. "Nobody would lend a cent to a man supposed to be crazy. I didn't have a nickel I could call my own at that

time. That demned family had my money so tied up with injunctions I couldn't get a dollar out with a bootjack. And Lorraine's money is a trust fund. No, young fellow, I've got you to thank for it, and I'll do it—my own way."

"Yes sir," said Bentley rather meaninglessly, still wishing the subject would change.

"I called you a silent partner in this deal, young man. That means I owe you some profit—call it interest on your loan. Now I'm still in trouble with that damned cousin of mine trying to restrain me as incompetent. Incompetent! Bah! I've supported the lazy loafer all his life, and he calls me incompetent! That's none of your business—yet. I was saying I'm still in trouble—not out of it, yet. But I've got a little money from the Government subsidy. I've got a check here for one hundred and ten thousand dollars—that's ten per cent profit on your investment, young fellow—maybe not much for a young swindler like John J. Destiny, but not bad money for most folks. Here, take it. Now that's done and finished. I've got other things to talk about—at dinner. Come along. We'll go down to dinner."

Bentley held the check limply in his hand, staring at it blankly. What a fine old man! How different from other men he had had business with. How unlike the Rysters and the Caddises and the Jossops of this world! And suddenly he felt a great warmth surge through him. He got up and held out his hand to Dr. Graymaster.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I do thank you, sir. And I'm mighty glad that I was able to help you win success after all your trying to give that light to the Government. But—but well, I—I hope we shall be able to keep this money all in the family, sir. I should be proud if you will let me—"

"Ha! Bah!" the old man snorted suddenly, pulling away. "That's just what I want to talk about. Come along to dinner."

And he led the way out of the room.

IT was a good dinner. Doctor Graymaster was an excellent host, a gourmet. But it became more emphatically noticeable as the dinner went on that the old man was avoiding or postponing the very thing which Bentley, now that the die was finally cast, wanted most to discuss.

Finally, with the coffee and the excellent Armagnac which the Doctor

provided, Bentley himself stubbornly broached the subject in a manner more direct than skillful.

"I suppose," he said, "that Lorraine has told you that I want very much to marry her, Doctor."

The old man gave him a piercing look, but he only said:

"Ha! Yes, of course."

"Well—" Bentley began to stumble a little. "Well, sir, as her guardian, I wanted to ask you—well, the usual sort of thing, I suppose. I mean to say, I'm not much of a man. I'm not half good enough for her, I know, but—"

That seemed to set off the springs.

"Ha!" spat the lean old gentleman acidly. "Better get this over with once for all. Tell you straight, young man, I like you. Think you're a little crazy, but that's all right. Lorraine likes you too. That's fine—far as it goes."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Mean? I mean you'd better hurry. What you think girls are these days, anyhow? Fine girl, Lorraine—none better. But headstrong. That's it, headstrong. Took her to Washington. What's she do but pick up some smart idiot of the engineering corps to tear around with. Pushy young fellow, he is. Knows what he wants. That's more than you seem to, Destiny. Rushing her head off; that's what he's doing. Got me worried."

Bentley turned suddenly red, then pale.

"You mean—you mean, sir, that Lorraine is in love with another—" He could not finish his sentence. The very idea was too foreign to him, too strange, too incredible. So *that* was why Lorraine had not written!

But Dr. Graymaster shook his head.

"Didn't say that," he said abruptly. "Didn't say such fool thing. Lorraine's all right. She's a good girl. She's no flirt, and no bubble-head. But she *is* a woman, young feller. And she's a Graymaster. Now, all I want to say is that if you want to marry Lorraine, do it now. Don't wait. Don't postpone it. She arrives tomorrow. That young whipper-snapper of a captain will be down here for a week-end, uniform and all. I'm just giving you a warning, young Destiny. We Graymasters don't go in for long, prosaic waiting. If you want that girl, take an old man's advice and get married—this week. Hear?"

And it was then that the inflated pride took its fall.

Bentley stared at the old man, hearing those words like a death-sentence.



"Maybe I oughter go fifty-fifty with a feller that could 'a' gypped me, but didn't," said Caddis.

"This week, sir?"

"Why not? You aint the kind of young puppy that goes in for big social weddings, I'll be bound. Man wants a woman, he takes her. That's the strong man's way, young Destiny. What you want to wait for?"

"But—but I—I can't," groaned Bentley. "Not for at least four months—"

"Four months! Bah! Don't be a fool. If you wait, you'll lose her. I know that girl. She's bulldozed me for years."

Bentley got to his feet. His head was reeling under the blow of a situation which he had never dreamed of. He had no answer. Until four months were over, until he had made his million for Brood, he was a nobody, a pauper, did not even own his own name. Marry Lorraine—now! Force her to live the precarious life of a puppet on a string, drag her into this Personal Mystery business? It was impossible, unthinkable.

"I—I—I've got to go, sir," he mumbled. "Excuse me, sir, but I've—I've got to think—got to think things out."

THE aftermath of fallen pride is a pitiful thing, and that night was one of anguish and stark terror to Bentley Dewert. Only that same morning he had been so blithe, so naïve in his exuberance, saluting his reflection in the mirror with: "Hi, there, young Destiny, they can't get us down!"

But they had got him down now.

"Fool's paradise! That's what I was living in!" he groaned. "Only a fool would go on telling himself that a girl with Lorraine's attractiveness could suddenly decide to settle down and marry a—a four-flushing mountebank like John J. Destiny. Fool—fool's paradise!"

That was part of it, of course. But there was another part which was even more deadly.

Marry her at once—get a ring on her finger before some smart military bird in uniform makes her change her mind!

He repeated the Doctor's words, with a bitterness that was bile in his mouth.

"Ha-ha-ha! Oh, ha-ha, ha-ha!" he laughed mirthlessly. "That's a hot one. Marry her! Ask her to marry me—and who am I to ask anybody to marry me—just a nobody, just a poor sap without even a name that's my own."

And there was reason for this bitterness. The reason lay spread out on his desk—his old contract with Brood. In black and white, neatly typed, one little clause read:

"Valid for one year or until you shall have accumulated a sum of money or assets equal to one million dollars in United States currency."

There it was. You couldn't laugh off a thing like that. Not when Brood had written the contract himself.

And the irony of it—the terribly sneering irony of it meant just one thing: With the Chinese money, Hartlow's sixty thousand and Graymaster's hundred and ten thousand dollars, all in his pocket, so to speak, not one penny of it belonged to him—until he had completed the million dollars mentioned in the contract. Not a penny.

Fool's paradise indeed!

"Seven-hundred-thousand-dollar pauper! Poor little billionaire! Oh, God, the fantastic irony!"

But after pacing his rooms more than half the night, after falling face downwards, fully dressed, on his bed in the sleep of sheer nervous exhaustion, after awakening late in the morning with the same agony burning in his heart, there was still more cruel irony to come.

A THUMPING on the door and an angry buzzing of his doorbell finally woke him. He shifted drearily off the bed and dragged his listless feet to the door.

He turned the knob and opened, not even raising his eyes, just saying:

"Go away—go away—let me alone."

A voice outside said roughly:

"Jeepers creepers, son, whassamatter, you sick?"

And burly Jo Caddis pushed in.

Bentley did not so much as offer Jo his hand. He had no curiosity about the man. He stood staring at the bedraggled creature who confronted him in his mirror, hollow-eyed, unshaven, unkempt in his slept-in, wrinkled clothes, while Jo Caddis watched him open-mouthed.

"Whassamatter with you, son?" Jo asked, full of concern.

"GO away." Bentley was fumbling for his hat, making shift to straighten his necktie, making ineffectual gestures toward washing his hands. "Go away—can't you go away?"

"Listen, son, you gotta listen to me. This is Jo Caddis, see? This is old Jo Caddis. You got a hangover? You been on a bender, hey?"

"Please—please let me alone."

"You gotta listen, son, on account I hadda come. Maybe I'm a crook, but I got some ethics. You could 'a' gypped me, an' you didn't gyp me, son. You're a white guy, son. I hadda come an' tell you straight. An' I figure—"

"Won't you please let me alone?"

He had his hat on now. He had picked up the contract with Ephraim Brood which still lay on his table, and he had thrust it deep into his pocket.

"Brood!" he muttered. "Just Brood's ghost, Brood's shadow—Brood's puppet—slave of Ephraim Brood—oh, God!" And then he walked out of his door without so much as a glance at Jo Caddis, who stood there gaping at him, holding a limp piece of paper in his hand, his perpetual stogie sagging in his mouth.

"Hey, hey, you damned fool, whassamatter?" called Jo to the young man's stooping back. "Listen, son, you gotta tell me." But John J. Destiny had vanished down the hall.

"I be damned, complete in one piece!" Thus Jo Caddis vented his amazed astonishment. "The boy has gone nuts. He aint only sick, he's nuts. What's he mean, Ephraim Brood?"

But Jo Caddis was a man for quick thinking, and quicker change of thinking into action. Ephraim Brood. . . Surely that was the name this crazy young fool had been muttering. Ephraim Brood. He knew that name. Everybody who is anybody knows that name. Brood, the soap king—tough little number, that



Brood. Now, why would this here, now, Destiny be mixed up with Brood? What was it he said? Brood's puppet—Brood's ghost—slave of Ephraim Brood? The boy was bughouse for sure.

But Jo Caddis had a deeper motive than that for what he did. In his hand he still held a check. In all his life he had never seen a man turn his back on a check—certainly not a check that big. Maybe he'd better find out about this.

He lifted the telephone. He said to the operator at Brood's switchboard:

"You put your big shot Brood on this phone right away, sister, and don't gimme no argument. This here is Jo Caddis—Joseph J. Caddis, that's who. Make it quick, sister."

And when the barking voice of Ephraim Brood came over the wire, Jo matched his bark with:

"Now listen, Brood, and shut up till I get through. You know this young feller named Destiny—John J. Destiny? Yeah? Well, I like that boy, see? And that boy's in a jam, see? Now, I wanna ask you some questions. . . . Hello, hello—what's that? . . . *What?*?"

IT may have been only two or three hours, perhaps four, but to Bentley it seemed like as many days, or weeks or years. When the hard beat of sun on his face finally aroused him, he found that he had been sleeping on a bench for some indeterminate period. He stood up sharply. For one flickering instant he had forgotten; then grim memory came over him and he sank back to the bench.

"Brood," he muttered. "I've got to see Brood. Got to go and see Brood—got to tell him I'm through."

And he lurched down the hard pavement while a throng of other bench-sitters eyed him knowingly.

It was, nevertheless, long after noon-day when Bentley's tired feet finally dragged themselves into the door of the Ephraim Brood Company and stumbled into the slow-moving elevator. Upstairs in Brood's offices, the receptionist stared astonished at this white-faced, unshaven young man.

"Tell him—Mr. Brood—must see him now—right off—must see him."

And she answered a surprising thing.

"Go right in, Mr. Destiny," she said. "Mr. Brood is waiting for you."

BENTLEY had been talking for fully fifteen minutes. It had been an outpouring from an overflowing heart swamped with bitterness, discouragement and despair. He was through, a thousand times through; he did not want that million, did not want to go on being a trained seal, a puppet on Brood's string. He wanted life in its normal, natural way; he wanted love and marriage and happiness. He was through; he was handing back the contract; he was turning over seven hundred and seventy thousand dollars of money gained by Personal Mystery to Ephraim Brood. He didn't want that money. It was tainted money. He wanted no part of it. He wanted his own name back, his own personality. No more ghost-acting, no more pretense.

Brood sat there, watching him sadly.

"I'm sorry, boy. I'm sorry it worked out this way. But maybe things aren't quite as bad as you think they are."

Bentley lifted his head.

"Don't," he said. "Just don't—please," he said. "I—I can't stand it. I've lost her."

"You mean she won't marry you anyway, boy?"

"Marry me? Marry what—a two-bit newspaper man looking for a job?"

"Wait a minute, boy," said Brood.

"Let's do a little figuring."

"Please!" said Bentley. "Let me go, now."

"Wait a moment, boy," Brood insisted. "It was six hundred thousand you got from the Chinese thing, eh?"

Bentley nodded.

"And Dr. Graymaster gave you one hundred and ten?"

How many times had Bentley gone over those figures, ironical in their very bigness!

"And sixty thousand from Hartlow? That's seven hundred seventy thousand—right? And that leaves two hundred thirty thousand before your million is complete, eh? Pretty hopeless, eh? So you're quitting. Just quitting, within touching distance of your million, right? Now answer me, boy: you know a man named Caddis? You do, eh? A pretty hard case, that Caddis, eh? Has a pretty tough reputation, eh? That's what. Came to see you early this morning, didn't he? You know why he came?"

"What difference does it make?"

Brood shoved an envelope across his desk.

"These hard-bitten fellers sometimes have a soft side, Dewert," he said. "Better take a look at this. Caddis telephoned me after you walked out on him. Heard you mention my name. I told him to come up here. He brought this envelope for you. Says it's a matter of ethics—maybe you'll understand."

Bentley reached listlessly for the envelope, tore it open without interest, and pulled out a long blue piece of paper. It was a check for \$225,000, payable to John J. Destiny.

He stared at it, flushing.

"Good God!" he said. "Good God!"

"Caddis says when a man could cheat him and doesn't, it's the same as if they went fifty-fifty on a deal," Brood went on. "According to Caddis' code of ethics, he claims you share in the money he made. Does that help matters any, young man?"

"Oh!" Bentley was gasping now.

AND that," said Brood, "makes only five thousand dollars left on your million, boy. Think you can make five thousand before night?"

Bentley was on his feet.

"Mr. Brood," he was saying, "I can make five thousand dollars in five minutes. I can—"

"Wait a minute, boy. Do you remember your contract with Hartswell? Seems to me you get five thousand for writing a series of articles. Now maybe you'd better go and see the *Chronicle*."

But Bentley had snatched up his telephone and was dialing information.

"That's right," he was saying. "The name is *Graymaster*."

THE END

Here concludes the public career of Mr. Destiny. An unusual short story by Fulton Grant is scheduled for our next issue.

*An old guard writer gives
us a lively story of a 1939
immigration problem.*



The Chinese Way

By LEMUEL DE BRA

THIS is Lee Kwan," said Immigrant Inspector Neyldron. "He has given us many good tips. Now he has a strange story. And since you are in charge—"

"What's the story?" broke in Inspector-in-charge Malone, motioning them to chairs. Malone was a mild-spoken young man whose friendly blue eyes masked a keen brain. His transfer from an Eastern station to head of a Southwest division had aroused the jealousy of at least one of the older immigration men.

Ignoring the invitation to sit down, Inspector Neyldron leaned his lanky form against one end of Malone's desk. Lee Kwan eased his squat figure onto a chair. His saffron moon face was placid and guileless. He was dressed in American clothes. Malone tabbed him as a shrewd and fairly prosperous merchant.

"Too many Chinese here now, Mista Malone," Lee Kwan said in his clipped

English. "An' these men all ignorant laborers. Can do just ha'd wo'k. There is no wo'k for them here. Smugglers lied to them, robbed them. You must put stop to this business, Mista Malone. You must—"

"I must know what you're talking about," intervened Malone, smiling. He turned to Immigrant Inspector Neyldron. "You give it to me in simple language."

A smile flitted over Neyldron's thin, dark face.

"Okay, Chief. This is it: About twenty Chinks have been smuggled in by way of Mexico. They are hiding in an old cabin in Sunset Cañon, about sixty miles down the coast. The scheme is for these men to drift into Chinatown so gradually that they won't be noticed. They were taken to the cabin just last night, which means none have scattered yet. Understand?"

"I'm beginning to grasp it a little. Go on," directed Malone.

"Lee Kwan is squawking about them being common laborers not needed or wanted in the Chinese quarter. But I think the truth is that he and other Chinese are sore because this gang is composed entirely of young Chinese who took it on the lam to get out of serving in the Chinese army against the Japs. Most of them, Lee Kwan says, are criminals. Anyway, they got hold of enough money to pay the smuggling ring to bring them over."

Lee Kwan had been following Neyldron's words closely. Now he spoke up: "We don't want them in Chinatown, Mista Malone! They are bad Chinamen. You go get 'em. Send 'em back China. Make 'em fight!"

"We can send them back, and we will," said Malone. "But how do you know all this?"

Lee Kwan showed a mouthful of gold teeth. "I am honest merchant, Mista Malone. I am also good American. But I have family, an' I am not ready to have my throat cut."

"Mr. Lee has been giving us good tips for years," spoke up Inspector Neyldron. "No use asking him where he gets them. Now and then we find his tip is wrong, but we've always found Lee Kwan absolutely straight."

"I'm sure of that," agreed Malone. He asked a few more routine questions, then thanked the informer and assured him the Government would do its best. Lee Kwan bowed himself out.

"Of course, Mr. Neyldron," said Malone, "you know this cabin in Sunset Cañon."

"Very well. It has been used by smugglers before. It's in a desolate spot near the coast. No one would be likely to run into it. Woods grow up close. We can surround it easily."

"What do you suggest?"

Inspector Neyldron looked surprised, then pleased.

"I'll be glad to handle this for you, since you are new here. I can take Inspectors Corbett and McCready, run down there tonight just after dark, round up the whole bunch—probably without firing a shot, and have them all in jail here for you tomorrow morning. You can start deportation proceedings at once and have the whole outfit on the way back to China in record time. It'll be a nice feather in your new cap."

Malone took time to light a cigarette carefully.



"I haven't got a new cap," he said through a haze of smoke. "And I'm allergic to feathers. Any good fishing down there?"

"Fishing?" Neyldron frowned. "I guess so. There's a fair-sized stream in the cañon. Why?"

"Just wondering. Would you mind rounding up Corbett and McCready for me?"

"Sure!" Neyldron left, still frowning.

Malone reached for his desk phone, requested that his car be sent around to the rear door. Then he opened a drawer, got out a blued-steel revolver, saw that it was loaded, and put it in his shoulder holster.

Neyldron returned presently with Inspectors Corbett and McCready. They were in their thirties, seasoned men with excellent records. A timid man might hesitate to stop either of them on the street to ask for a match; but if he did, he'd get the match and a friendly word.

Malone put on his hat. "We're taking a little trip, gentlemen," he said. "You'd better each take your gun and handcuffs. Are you ready, Neyldron?"

The Inspector seemed suddenly uneasy.



"This is the Government!" Malone said. "Line up by that wall—all of you!"

"Surely, Mr. Malone, you're not going to knock off that Sunset Cañon case in daylight?"

"We are. Just as soon as we can get there."

"But Mr. Malone, it would be a lot safer to wait until after dark. We—" He broke off as Malone looked at him. "Of course," he fumbled, "you are in charge, but—"

"Neyldron," said Malone, "you have reminded me of that several times. I hope you don't force me to remind *you* of it. Let's go!"

THEY stopped at Malone's hotel. He was gone but a few minutes, returning in khaki breeches, duck coat, wide straw hat, and carrying a small casting-rod.

"Where's Neyldron?" asked Malone as he got behind the wheel.

"Went to phone his wife," replied Corbett. "Here he comes!"

Malone looked at Neyldron curiously but said nothing. He drove at moderate speed to the ocean, then turned down the beach highway. While driving, he explained to Corbett and McCready the purpose of their trip. When they had gone about fifty miles, he turned the wheel over to Inspector Neyldron.

Two miles farther on, Neyldron turned off the highway into a narrow road that wound quickly out of the sand dunes into the deep shadows of a redwood forest.

"The Sunset Cañon road is about five miles farther down the beach," Neyldron said. "But we might be tipped off if we go that direct route. This woods road will put us in the cañon about a quarter of a mile west of the old cabin. Okay, Chief?"

"Okay," said Malone.

"But Mr. Malone," spoke up Inspector Corbett, "if those Chinks were smuggled in by way of Mexico, why did they travel six hundred miles before trying to scatter?"

"I'm new here," said Malone. "What do you think, Neyldron?"

"It is unusual," the Inspector admitted. "But I figure they came this far in fast cars at night. They can scatter here without attracting so much attention. Fifteen strange Chinese in San Diego, or even in Los Angeles, would be noticed. Anyway, they're probably headed for the asparagus lands up the river."

"Mebbe," grunted Corbett. "But I'll bet a month's salary we won't find fifteen Chinese there. We may find four or five."

"I don't think we'll find any," said Chief Malone.

Neyldron's dark head jerked around. He stared at Malone.

"This doesn't merely look funny," Malone went on; "it looks fishy. I got a hunch it's just a trick to plant us here out of the way while something big is pulled off. That is why I rushed right down here. Tonight—when we're supposed to be down here in the woods—we'll be free and ready for anything."

A sly smile flitted over Neyldron's face, vanished quickly. He said nothing more, gave all his attention to piloting the car over the rough, winding road. At Malone's order he slowed down about a hundred yards from the cañon, eased the car off the road behind dense shrubbery.

"Neyldron," said Malone, getting out, "you and McCready slip through the woods to the east of the cabin. Corbett and I will close the cañon road on the west side. Will a twenty-minute start be enough for you?"

"Plenty. But when you're ready to strike, you'd better fire one shot. Then we—"

"No useless gunfire," objected Malone. "It sometimes starts more than we can finish. I got an old police whistle that was given me in New York. When you hear that, come quick!"

"Very well," Neyldron agreed, smiling. "Let's go, Mac!"

NEYLDRON and McCready soon disappeared in the woods. Just beyond where Malone saw them last, he noticed several bluejays rise into the air, heard their raucous squawking.

"Those bluejays make good sentinels," Malone remarked. "Say, Corbett, what's

on the beach at the end of the cañon? Could I make a long-distance phone-call there?"

"Oh, yes. There's a small summer resort there."

"Uh-huh!" Malone glanced at his wrist-watch. "Well, we may as well stroll along. I'll take my flies and see what's in that stream in the cañon."

THE way led through a narrow lane between lofty redwoods and firs, with here and there the soft brown of madrones. The road descended rapidly and soon they were in Sunset Cañon, a shallow gulch some two hundred feet wide. Here a road wound crookedly along one side of a noisy brook, flanked on the other side by manzanita, thorny scrub oak, and rhododendron.

Malone looked at the stream and made a wry face. "No fish here," he grunted; "but I can wet my line." He hooked on a fly, made a few casts. Corbett looked on with patient wonderment and disgust.

Presently Malone reeled in his line. "I'm going to the cabin," he said. "You follow me, but keep out of sight."

A few minutes steady walking brought Malone in sight of an old and fairly large cabin sprawling in the center of a small clearing between the road and the stream. The windows had been boarded up. The one door was closed. There was no sign of occupancy.

Malone turned off the road and stopped a moment to look around. Then, carrying his casting-rod, he walked directly up to the door and knocked loudly.

To his surprise, the door was drawn open a few inches. A dark face with slant eyes showed in the aperture. "Wha' you want?" a voice growled.

"How about a drink of water?" Malone asked.

"No got." The door started closing.

In a single swift movement Malone dropped his rod, snatched out his revolver and hurled his weight against the door. It flew open, knocking the Chinaman backward against an old table. He started a yell.

"Shut up!" ordered Malone. Jerking back his duck coat, he showed his badge. "Government! Put up your hands!"

The Chinaman reached high. Malone glanced around. This was a living-room. Beside the table were old chairs. In one corner was an old rust-pitted stove. Beyond the stove was a closed door.

"Walk ahead of me and open that door!" Malone ordered.

The Chinaman moved quickly to the door, flung it open. Malone could see only a part of the room, but he caught a glimpse of half a dozen Chinese gathered around a table. They were clad in worn and faded overalls and work-jackets.

"Go in!" ordered Malone. He followed the guard inside. Now the room seemed to be full of Chinese laborers. Some were squatting on the floor; others were lying down; a few others stood by the rear door. Malone flashed his badge again and gestured with his gun. "This is the Government!" he said. "Line up by that wall! All of you! And put your hands up!"

The guard broke into excited chattering. Malone told him to shut up.

"But I tell 'em what you say!" he cried excitedly. "They no sabby talk!"

"All right. Tell them I have the place surrounded. If they behave, nobody will get hurt."

The guard addressed the others in strident Cantonese. He talked so long Malone had to stop him.

"That's enough!" the Inspector said. "What's your name?"

"Lim Yee. I'm cook. You sabby? Come Los Angeles. All us come Los Angeles. Get wo'k on islands. Wo'k ha'd. Whassa mallee? What Gov'mint want with us?"

"I want to know how you left things in China."

"China? We no come China. Deesa men lib all time in Los Angeles."

"And haven't learned a word of English! Turn around, Lim Yee!"

The guard obeyed. Malone searched him quickly, found no weapon. Keeping his gun ready, Malone went down the line, searching each man for knife or gun. Finding nothing, he went back to the table, faced his prisoners.

INCLUDING Lim Yee, there were seventeen—all between twenty and thirty years of age, sturdy chaps with faces that showed more than average intelligence. On the floor were packs and bedding in various stages of disarray.

Malone laid his gun on the table and lit a cigarette. "Lim," he said, "you had a visitor a little while ago. Who was it?"

Lim Yee shook his head vigorously. "Nobody come—"

"I saw tracks of a car that tore out here and back. It stopped right out in front."

The guard grinned. "I fo'get. One man bringem meat fo' dinna'."

"Maybe he brought meat, but he also brought you a message. Well—" Malone took a paper from his pocket, looked at it a moment, then got out a pencil. "So you're Lim Yee," he said, and made a check-mark on the paper. "Now call off the names of the others. And you'd better get them right the first time."

Lim Yee hesitated, frowning in perplexity. Malone had to speak again.

The guard pointed a shaking finger at the man nearest him. "That Choy Man," he said.

Chief Malone made another check-mark. As fast as Lim Yee called off names, Malone made check-marks on his paper. When Lim Yee had finished, Malone folded the paper and put it back in his pocket.

He took up his revolver significantly.

"You're all under arrest. Gather up your junk! I'm sending you back to New York to face that tong killing charge."

A STUNNED silence followed that announcement. No one moved. Malone waited, watching the men closely. Outside, somewhere, a bunch of bluejays screamed angrily.

Suddenly Lim Yee found his voice.

"We arrest?" he shrilled. "Wha' fo'? Wha' fo'?"

"Mostly murder," said Malone. "I don't know what all else. But I know you're all tong killers, and that the New York police want you mighty bad."

There was another silence. This was broken by the one the guard had called Choy Man. He said something in Chinese. Lim Yee answered angrily. Followed a swift exchange of high-pitched Chinese. Malone stood waiting.

Presently Lim Yee turned to Malone.

"Mista Malone," he said very earnestly, "somebody make big mistake. Velly big mistake. We nebba come New York. Alle time we lib in China. We no likee big war. We pay smuggla bring us 'Melica. You sabby?"

Malone pretended great surprise. "So that's it? You've been smuggled in—by way of Mexico, I suppose?"

"Yes," declared Lim Yee. "Thass it."

"Well, in that case, I'll have to ship you right back to China. You sabby that?"

"Shuah. We sabby that. We no likee go back China. No likee big war. But—" He shrugged expressively.

The immigration man got out his old police whistle, raised it to his lips.

The blast did not come. For a moment Malone was motionless, his narrowed eyes watching the Chinese.

Suddenly he shoved the whistle back in his pocket. "Lim Yee," he said crisply, "bring me your pack! Make it snappy!"

Lim Yee's face showed bewildered surprise. After some hesitation he picked up a small canvas sack, laid it on the table. At Malone's order he dumped the contents. There were a few clean clothes; nothing else. "Put them away!" Malone ordered. "Choy Man, bring your pack!"

Lim Yee spoke quickly in Chinese. Choy Man strode up with a small straw bag. He emptied it onto the table. Same stuff. Just a few clean clothes.

ABOUT to order him to take the stuff away, Malone espied an edge of paper showing between the folds of a handkerchief. He drew the paper out, unfolded it, read it swiftly, and looked up at the Chinaman. Choy Man stood stiffly erect, his dark eyes guileless, his face as expressionless as stone.

Malone read the paper again, slowly. The Chinese were tensely silent.

Chief Malone looked up. He asked courteously: "Is your name James Ling?"

"Choy Man," said the Chinaman.

Malone picked up his gun, stowed it in its holster. He held the paper in his left hand, looked the Chinaman in the eyes. "I don't use a gun on an unarmed man," he said quietly. "I don't need to. Is your name James Ling?"

"Choy Man—"

Malone's right hand lashed out. His open palm struck the man a stinging slap across his jaw. "Are you James Ling?" Malone asked calmly.

"Choy—"

Again Malone's big hand struck a ringing slap on the Chinaman's face. The blow was expertly done, and for a predetermined effect. The Chinaman staggered, then stiffened and took a step toward the white man. Rage flamed in his eyes.

"What right have you got to strike me that way?" he cried furiously. "Just because you are a Government man does not—"

At Lim Yee's warning cry he broke off. Confusion flooded his face.

Malone smiled. "It's all right, Jimmy, old boy!" he assured him. "When I saw this most interesting document, I knew you could speak English. Probably have more book education than I have. And Lim Yee's pidgin English didn't have the

right ring. Jimmy, that old police slap is hard to take, isn't it? I hated to do it to you, and I'm glad to apologize. But I had to hurt—"

"It didn't hurt so much, Mr. Malone," said James Ling. "It staggered me, confused me, enraged me, made me forget myself and—"

"I know just how it works, Jimmy. I suppose all those names Lim Yee called off were phony?"

"Sure." James Ling smiled. "Just like the paper you checked off. You didn't fool us with that, but your threat to send us back to New York called for quick action. We weren't guilty of anything like that; but now—"

Malone gestured with the paper he had found. "Have all the boys got one of these?"

"Every one," said James Ling proudly.

"Congratulations! And again I apologize, Jimmy, for what I did. Now just one thing more: how much did Inspector Neyldron get out of this?"

"Absolutely nothing, Mr. Malone! We offered him money, but he refused. He said he was glad to help us."

"That's the best news I've heard yet!" exclaimed Malone. "And now—" He blew a long blast on his police whistle, followed by a series of "hurry-up" shorts.

"Afraid to fight?" exclaimed Malone. "Why, those boys took a chance on serving a prison sentence just to get an opportunity to fight for the land of their fathers—a land that they themselves have never seen. Those boys were born in America, educated here, and every one of them has a diploma from an aviation school. They want to go to China to fly fighting planes, and to fight the Japs. Under the law, the Department of State can't give them passports. So some one concocted this scheme of posing as smuggled Chinese in the hope that we would deport them to China. It was a clever scheme with a noble motive. I'm sorry I had to bust it up."

"THEN," spoke up Inspector Neyldron hopefully, "you're not going to—to take any action in this case?"

"I suppose," said Malone, "that if I dug hard enough, I could make out a case of attempting to defraud the United States. But I haven't time to look into that now. I want to see if the fishing isn't better farther up the cañon. Okay, boys?"

"I'll say it is!" shouted Neyldron. "Anyway—you are in charge!"

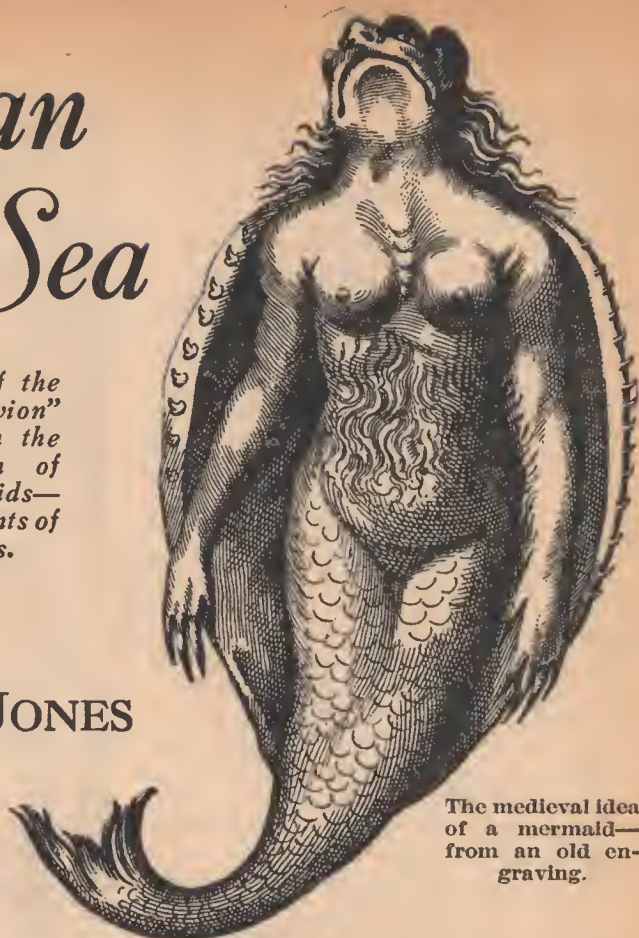
Woman Of the Sea

*This twelfth story of the
"Trumpets from Oblivion"
series is based upon the
world-wide tradition of
mermen and mermaids—
quasi-human inhabitants of
remote deep seas.*

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by
Clinton Shepherd



The medieval idea
of a mermaid—
from an old en-
graving.

HOW the mermaid argument began, I don't know. It raged all over the golf-course that summer afternoon, and at the nineteenth hole it settled into a hot debate. Heise, the banker, contended it was all piffle, all delusion. The Padre said the legend had been traced back to the manatee or dugong, a Caribbean creature resembling a woman when swimming. Briggs argued with his legal mind that since mermaid legends were old as history and were found all over the world, even among American Indians, they must have some basis of prehistoric fact.

My argument was that many towns and seacoasts have been swallowed up by the sea, and it was natural for ignorant peoples to imagine mermen and mermaids existing as survivors of the lost population.

Heise said this was nonsense.

"Most of the old mermaid legends," he affirmed, "deal with lakes or rivers, not with the sea: the very name of mermaid—meer-maid or lake-woman—shows this."

"That's European legend only," argued the Padre. "What about the Assyrian fable, thousands of years ago? As a matter of fact, no man knows definitely about the derivation."

"One man does," I said. "One man can tell us, can even show us, where this mermaid belief came from! That man is Norman Fletcher."

"Hello!" The Padre eyed me. "You mean the electrical genius? The wizard of the Pan-American Corporation? I've often wanted to meet that man; he's famous all over the world; yet we hardly know him here in the city where he lives."

"He lives mostly at his laboratories outside town," I rejoined.

"I've heard a lot about Norman Fletcher," said Briggs, with interest. "They say he's greater than Marconi or Steinmetz; that his investigations into ultrasonic waves have revolutionized television and radio. Do you know him?"

I nodded. "Rather well. During the spring, he gave weekly demonstrations to our Inventors' Club. He believes that all myths and legends have a factual basis, and proved it to us. His general theory is that sound and light never die, and can be brought back—that, for instance, he can reconstruct past events. It's some sort of television with reverse English—though he denies it; I can describe it in no other way. He could show us where the mermaid myth arose, if he took the notion. Shall I give him a ring?"

There was immediate acclaim, though nobody believed Fletcher had any such powers. I got the inventor on the telephone and told him of our argument.

He laughed.

"Bring your friends out tomorrow evening, if you like. Mermaids? Well, I guarantee nothing, but we'll see what happens if we go fishing in the seas of antiquity! I'll get the apparatus shaped up today and see what I can find. . . . Tomorrow evening, then."

So it was arranged. Knowing from experience what we would see, I tried to tell the others, and prepare them, especially the Padre. I need not have worried; he was as curious and eager to see Twentieth Century magic as any of us.

NEXT evening we drove out. The Pan-American laboratories were impressive, a small city in themselves, elaborately walled and guarded. A good deal of war work was going on in connection with the national defense program, and Fletcher was said to have perfected some marvels in this regard. Yankee ingenuity is far from dead.

Our host received us beamingly. He too was impressive, with his mane of white hair, his ruddy ageless countenance, his personal charm. He took us into his private laboratory with the stone walls, where little of anything was to be seen.

Before the blank end wall of solid granite were ranged comfortable chairs; a cigar humidor stood open, and we made ourselves comfortable. Norman Fletcher seated himself before his controls, the only piece of apparatus in sight; this looked like a triple-manual organ, and was apparently unconnected with any other apparatus. He lit a cigar and regarded us genially.

"I suppose you know that you're now in a house of rank magic," he observed lightly, "where everything's done by electricity or by wave-force! Seriously, I've looked into this mermaid question, with interesting results. I've had to make a special sound-track for the voices, in modern language; while I can create, or re-create, scenes from the past, the language offers difficulty."

"Do I understand," asked the Padre, "that we're about to see what actually took place at some past time?"

"Correct," replied Norman Fletcher. "I don't wish to explain the process, except that it involves new discoveries in ultrasonic waves. Within the past few weeks I've evolved some new tubes, but



they require a little time to warm, so there's no hurry. Now for the mermaid myth! It's as old and universal as the hills; the fact that it has fascinating variants would indicate it to be founded on truth.

"I've chanced on one of those variants," he continued, puffing easily at his cigar, "which may serve as a general type or example of how the legend evolved in all ages. Among the early Portuguese explorers arose a singular tale of mermaids who grew on their backs a long hairy mantle which they could hook together in front, or leave open, at will. This passed into Italian, then into French and Dutch narratives and books."



"Tell him to send his men and bring back one of these gods," said Dom Luis Argelho to the interpreter. "We'll pay well."

"Quite true," said the Padre eagerly. "It arose from stories of seamen who had seen the dugong or sea-cow swimming about the South American shores."

Fletcher, smiling, shook his head and exhaled a thin cloud of cigar-smoke.

"I'm sorry to contradict, but it did not. We find it in the narratives of early Portuguese voyages down the coast of Africa, before the Americas were discovered." He took a paper, an old and yellowed map, from the top of his instru-



ment-board and handed it to me. It was a map of the West African or Congo coast, of 1731. "Look at this; the legend, you see, persisted to comparatively recent years. Look at the top left corner. Inside Cape Lobo, or Lopez as it is today—see those islands? That's the spot. The squadron of Argelho touched there briefly in the Fifteenth Century, getting fresh water from the river-mouth. It was a grand place for wrecks, since—"

HE ceased speaking; the room lights dimmed; upon the stone wall before us, a yellowish light began to play, gradually becoming more intense; it came from nowhere—there was no projection, no ray in the air. It just grew, and as it grew, the stones dissolved.

I heard startled exclamations. The Padre caught his breath. To me it was no novelty, yet the wizardry of the thing gripped me now as always. The wall had disappeared, and we were looking through it, as through a window, upon a sunny sandy beach under blue skies. It was a wide river-mouth. Outside the bar were anchored three Portuguese caravels, Fifteenth Century ships. Beyond them showed the bluff outlines of Cape Lopez; inside the cape were patches of green, islands thick with trees, a good two miles from the shore.

Here on the sandy beach where boats were drawn up, were men white and black. A group of Portuguese in armor, with watchful guards; other men filling casks of water. Talking with them were

savage blacks—a chief, seated, while a warrior held a shade of leaves above him, and other warriors clustered around. An interpreter spoke. All was peaceful; trinkets had been exchanged, gifts made, and files of blacks were bringing fruits and palm-nuts down to the boats.

"It's an amazing thing!" exclaimed Dom Luis Argelho, bearded and gaunt. "Tell him to send his men and bring us back one of these gods. We'll pay well."

THE interpreter spoke. The black chief and his men broke into dismayed words; a fetish wizard shook his rattle and howled in negation. The interpreter turned.

"They say no; the gods of the islands must not be disturbed. They have the shape of women, with tails like fish. From their backs grow hairy mantles, which they can close in front. Sometimes they come here to the shore, where offerings are left for them at certain seasons—piles of fruit. It is forbidden for anyone to approach them or injure them, since they bring good luck. This is very certain, the wizard says. They have brought the tribe great good luck and much wealth. If you disturb their gods, they'll attack us."

Young Carvalho laughed and mouthed a jest about mermaids and seamen. He was young and bold of eye, nor did the eye lie: he was reckless of life, ever ready to dare anything on these African shores, for behind him in Portugal lay ruin. War had swept away all he had or was, war and drink and dissipation. Now, hardened by the voyage south, he looked the bold spirit he was. The commander glanced at him and frowned.

"Carvalho! I ordered that every man ashore should be armed. Where's your armor?"

Carvalho's bold eyes twinkled. "Excellency, I lost it at the dice last night. I think Diego de Senza wears the breast-plate; I see the morion on the head of Dom Joao yonder—"

A laugh went up, and the Admiral bit his lip. It was impossible to be angry with Carvalho. At this instant a shouting arose among the blacks; their voices rose in clamor, and they began to point with their spears.

The interpreter exclaimed suddenly:

"Excellency! They say one of the gods is coming now—look, look!"

The Portuguese turned. And Carvalho, staring with the rest, saw what he had never thought to see in life.

An object, a person, was swimming in toward the beach. It avoided the three ships, off to the right; along this shore, in shelter of the cape, was almost no surf at all. It was heading straight for the group, and man after man crossed himself furtively or gasped low oaths.

"A woman!" exclaimed one. "Look!"

The swimming thing paused, as though in alarm at so many folk, and swung up on a high wave-crest. A woman—no doubt of it. A woman, white and shimmering, with a queer high something humped on her back. She plunged with the wave and was gone, then came up again, but no longer a woman.

Amazement seized Carvalho and the others. They could see her plainly, now a great hairy beastlike shape. One of the men aboard the ships had fired an arquebus. The shot hit close to her; the smoke bellowed; the report echoed. No longer a woman, but a swimming beast, the thing turned about and headed out and away for the island.

"After her with a boat!" cried Carvalho. The interpreter exclaimed quickly, and Argelho issued prompt denial.

"No! These blacks would attack in a moment. They're angry now, because of that shot. Mermaid or monster, let the creature go, and have no trouble. We'll be out of this accursed place in a day or two, but we must keep these tribes friendly. This is a splendid spot in which to found a settlement and trading-post. . . . Eh? What's that?"

The black chief was speaking earnestly and showing something at his neck; a gold coin, strung on a chain of cowrie shells. According to the interpreter, a gift long ago from those gods of the island. Argelho examined the coin.

"A golden ducat of Venice, apparently, but much worn," said he. "No others like that? Then let it pass. Curious! The monster is gone from sight. Well, to work, to work! Ask him what price he will take for that high ground along the river. Tell him we may come to help him against his enemies and make trade, and open a station here."

LET it pass, a golden ducat of Venice? Not easily, at least for Carvalho; gods who could provide one such broad gold-piece, might provide more. He played with this thought; and it set his brain afire. . . .

Shrewd Fray Marcos hit the nail on the head, that night, as he talked with the commander. From discussing the



"Where are the gods of this island?" Carvalho demanded.

marvel and making sketches of it, the good friar went on to the subject of Carvalho, who had lost at dice everything he owned except sword and dagger.

"There's grand stuff in him, but he's found life too easy," said the friar. "Now he's well on the road toward hell, and has missed the turning."

"What turning?" asked the blunt Argelho, frowning over this symbolic speech.

"The road called Incentive," replied Fray Marcos. "He knows nothing better in life than riotous living. He's totally ruined, financially; he borrowed money in Lisbon to pay for his equipment on this voyage. The steel in him has never been tempered; the manhood in him has never been awakened."

"He can fight like Satan himself!" growled the commander.

The friar smiled sadly.

"Aye, like Satan, more's the pity! Over a wench, an insult, a bottle of wine. That's the limit of his horizon. Now he'll become desperate, reckless of life, and reach hell fast. I'll have a talk with him in the morning."

The good friar was a pessimist; his appraisal wronged Carvalho somewhat. When with morning he sought the latter, to admonish him, no Carvalho was found. He was not aboard. He had stood watch until midnight, but not a

soul knew anything about him after that.

Carvalho had vanished. At this, panic seized the men; in view of the prodigy they had witnessed, all of them, they believed this to be a place of devils. Even Argelho flew into a passion, to hide his own uneasiness.

"The tide's just past flood," said he. "Up anchor, and off with the ebb! Away from this accursed spot! Straight out to sea—give that cape a wide berth."

SO they did, leaving Carvalho sound asleep—on the sun-warmed sand of the island of the gods. Letting himself overboard by a trailing line, unseen of any, he had struck out in the dawn-darkness. Sword and dagger, shirt and jerkin—nothing else to hamper him. The water was warm; he was ignorant of sharks. He came to the island shore exhausted, staggered up under the nearest greenery, and dropped in the sand.

He wakened with morning well along, to look for the ships. They were gone. He saw them at last, bearing far out to sea to round the cape. He gaped at them, felt a quick spasm of panic, then rallied and laughed.

"Alone!" he exclaimed. "Alone in Africa! Alone with the gods—and mermaids! Well, the ducats of Venice won't do me much good now."

It was nothing to be merry about. His heart sank most damnably when he realized that the ships were gone, and not returning. He could not understand it. He had thought they would be here for another day or two, and that he could spend a few hours exploring the island of the gods—and the Venetian gold.

He sat down to watch the sails out of sight and to think it over. Occasional ships came along here, Portugals and others; very occasional Moors came at times, for slaves and gold-dust, and from them he could expect only slavery; the Moors were the terror of the world. Until the caravels returned, which might not be for months, he was marooned.

From the blacks on the mainland he might or might not get welcome; safety was not so certain either. However, the blacks did not come here to the islands. Their boats were mere dugout canoes for river use and they seldom or never ventured offshore.

"There remain only the gods—or monsters—to consider." Carvalho came up to his feet. He gazed around, looked toward the river and the mainland, and

laughed again; this time with more of a ring to the laugh.

"The unknown gods, and this new land of Africa!" he said, and put hand to sword. He loosed the blade, and his dirk, from the scabbards; both had been greased against the water, and he wiped the polished steel clean and dry. "If the gods are only women, why worry? On, then, and probe destiny!"

Sound of his own voice lent him heart; let courage be what it may, Africa is a land of monsters, and to him was a world unknown.

He surveyed the greenery close at hand, essayed it, and recoiled with a shake of the head. Trees and brush and thorns grew in a tangled mass, and he could discover no path by which entry might be had. After all, the shore offered the easiest way, and he turned to it.

He kept close to the trees, mindful that the blacks might see him, otherwise, and come over with their spears and bows to defend their gods. He was thankful when at last a curve of the shore hid him from the mainland, and he could leave the loose sand for the harder beach. To his naked feet, the sun-hot sand was torture.

He kept on and on. The island was some miles in length. Twice he saw paths entering the brush, but decided not to risk them; the open felt safer. Insensibly, he turned the end of the island, and out of sight fell the river-mouth. The long cape, toward which he was now facing, was shut out from his vision by other islands, none of any size but all thickly grown. Islands and reefs, a maze of them, and sandspits.

ON one of those islets Carvalho saw something move and leap; stopping dead, he stared, and then a chuckle escaped him. A goat, several goats; probably wild ones. Curious! How had they come to be on the islet yonder? There were no tracks hereabouts. He had seen no tracks at all, in fact—

As this thought occurred to him, he was again on his way, only to come again to a dead halt. Speak of the devil, and he appears! There was a track now; the tide was high and it showed only in the dry sand, but it seemed to be made by footprints, curving back into the water again. Did the swimming gods, then, walk like humans?

A little unnerved amid the morning silence, he went on. Sunlight and silence and the multitudinous noise of the water

amid the reefs. He went on, until his pace slowed and his dark eyes widened on the scene that opened.

The beach curved inward among rocks, and from the island's heart issued a sparkling rill of water to be lost in the sea. The brook vanished under a green tangle of fronds and high palms, but along it ran an obvious beaten trail. On the sand lay drawn up a queer shapeless little boat of skins stretched on a framework, and beside it were two rude paddles; with these were heaped several hairy skins. One, by itself, was outstretched, and the amazed Carvalho beheld on its larger end a huge painted mouth and eyes.

Fear shook him. Mermaids came out of the sea, and shed these queer mantles—ah! Mermaids used no boat like this, no paddles! Something stirred and moved among the trees; he swung around. A flitting object whirled past his head and splashed in the sea. With it came a sound he recognized, a twanging, clanging sound—a crossbow had been fired, the quarrel had missed him.

INSTANTLY he was himself again. That crossbow was reality! Joyously he laughed, and to play safe, crossed himself swiftly, then spread out his hands.

"A friend!" he cried aloud. "Whether you be gods, monsters or devils, I'm a man alone and a friend."

"A friend!" The trees seemed to echo the words, but it was a human voice. "A friend, Felicia! And he signed himself! Moors don't do that!"

"Quiet, Melusine!" sounded another voice, in Spanish like the first.

"Felicia! Name of fair omen!" said Carvalho gayly. "A goddess, by your voice; and by your name a creature of happiness and beauty! Appear, divinity, and assure yourself that I'm no enemy!"

He advanced to the brook, knelt beside it, and drank with a sigh of relief. He had begun to dread the tortures of thirst. When he rose, Felicia was approaching from the shelter of the trees.

He swallowed hard. His laughter died. Here was a woman bent, gnarled, stooped, and not a little mustached; an old woman, clad in rags and tatters. She glared at him.

"You are no Portuguese!" she cried accusingly. "We knew you were a Moor. Those were Moorish ships here yesterday!"

"Portuguese, honest Christian caravels of Lisbon," said Carvalho, and gave



his name. His astonishment at her Spanish speech was extreme. Still, she was swarthy, like some Spaniards. "Where are you from, senhora?"

The old woman laughed, cackling harshly, but her shrill mirth was wild and witless.

"Liar! You're a Moor, an infidel, a pagan!" She shook a skinny fist at him. "You don't fool me, you scoundrel! I know what you're here for, curse you, curse you, curse you—"

She fell into a screaming, raging fury. In the midst of it, she cried out upon God and toppled forward, blood running from her mouth. Carvalho knelt and lifted her head; she was dead before he touched her.

Bewildered, dismayed, aghast, he set her down and rose. Startled, he found a girl at his side, silent-footed, her gaze driving into him. He crossed himself and took a step backward. She was all white and black and scarlet—black hair and eyes, white skin, scarlet lips and ruddy cheeks, wearing a loose white gown. Under his look, her face changed, her eyes became gentle with grief. She stooped, touched the old woman.

"Poor Felicia! She has suffered so much that it feebled her mind," said she

gravely. "Carvalho, you said? I am Melusine Sarmiento, of Burgos in Castile. Are your ships here?"

"They have gone. I'm alone," he stammered.

She gestured and turned.

"Bring her. Madness had grown upon her; she said they were Moorish ships. None the less, she was a true friend. Bring her, and leave her with me and my grief. I'll talk with you later."

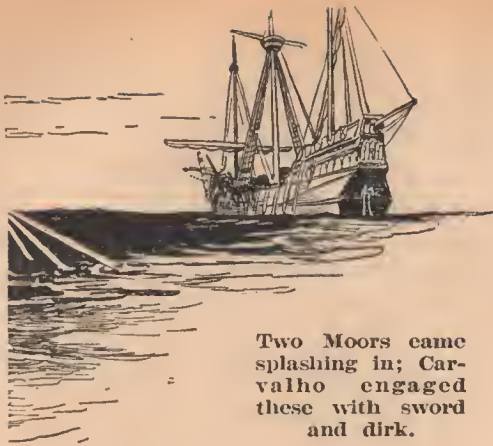
Carvalho saw that, beneath her impassive exterior, emotion was struggling. He picked up the skin-and-bone corpse and followed Melusine along the trail. It took them among thick trees, into shadowy recesses. He saw goats staked out on tethers; two thatched huts; a wide clearing where yams were growing, and behind this a grave marked with a wooden slab.

Melusine pointed to this slab.

"Put her down. Leave her with me; it is my affair, not yours. Wait on the shore."

He obeyed, awed by her beauty, her authority, her cool self-possession. Of the reputed gods or monsters he saw no sign.

Out on the white beach again, he lay stretched out comfortably, still puzzled,



Two Moors came
splashing in; Car-
valho engaged
these with sword
and dirk.

but making the best of it. A sound of sobbing came from the trees; afterward all was silent. And then, when the sun was high, she came in her fleet silent way, and dropped beside him.

"She is buried," said she simply. "Here—I have brought you fruit to eat."

"Where are the gods of this island?" he demanded.

She gestured scornfully. "I remain; the other two are dead. There are no gods, Carvalho."

IT took him a long while to understand. They moved into the shade and remained there talking, while comprehension came to him; her story did not come forth all at once, but by degrees. It was a grim tale; life was grim for many a woman then, and she was but a girl.

Two years she had dwelt on this island, with the old woman and a man, now also dead.

Raiding Moors in Spain had captured her; little more than a child, they had sent her as a gift to the sultan in Marrakech, by a ship that came down the coast past Mazagan. Storms took that ship, buffeting it on and on helplessly; then the slaves rose and killed those that remained of the Moors.

In slave hands, with none to guide, the ship met more storm, and came at last ashore of a night, here among the islands. Three lived—Melusine, old Felicia, and another slave named Diego, who was crippled by hurts, but was a crafty and cunning man. They thought they were on some Moorish coast, taking all blacks to be Moors, and acted accordingly.

"Diego made them think we were gods," she said. "A few goats, that were aboard our ship, reached that island yonder, and in time they multiplied. Diego did many things with their skins, and

their flesh fed us, and their milk. We do not lack here."

Carvalho comprehended finally that the blacks had never seen these three as they were, so craftily had Diego played on the superstition of the savages. Both women, forced to every artifice to sustain life, became expert swimmers, and for them Diego made the queer mantles of goatskin.

"I'll show you." She stood up and regarded him gravely. "Turn around and don't look until I call."

Carvalho obeyed implicitly; he was still in awe of her; his better instincts were roused by her loveliness and her trust. When she called, he turned and saw her in the water, with one of the skin mantles wrapped about her, and her gown lying on the sand. She showed him how, thus wrapped, she could swim without her limbs being seen, or how the mantle could be put back in a roll if need were.

This was the explanation of the "gods" which had impressed blacks and whites alike. . . .

For Carvalho, a new existence now began, an existence touched with wonder and bitter work and hard days and terror; for when he wakened next morning, he found Melusine tossing with fever, in the hut she occupied alone.

Of leechcraft he knew very little. He could only use his common sense, which was not too extensive, and trust that careful tending and her own iron constitution would pull her through. She weakened with the days, and passed into delirium; the fever burned out and recurred again until she was but a thin wasted shadow, and all her loveliness a radiant shroud that presaged death.

Death, however, came not.

AS the days wore on, the young man became a different person. The gay, daredevil cavalier was quickly lost. The Carvalho who remained was a shaggy bearded man plagued by a devil of anxiety and torment, accomplishing the impossible. For the crippled Diego who lay under a wooden slab, he attained a fervent admiration, in view of all that poor devil had accomplished and so little to do with.

A hand-ax, an old crossbow with half a dozen bolts, a knife—nothing else, except a few bits of wreckage; with these Carvalho carried on. Responsibility was his, for the first time in life. By his hands, they two must live: fish from the



reefs and pools, flesh from the goats, yams from the ground and fruits from the trees. The blacks, on the mainland, piled their offerings near the river-mouth and twice Carvalho went over in the frail skiff and brought back a load of fruits, at dead of night.

He tended Melusine carefully, gently, ceaselessly. His naked feet grew hard, and his body grew hard; his mind, too, grew hard, and his character firm. But tenderness deepened in him none the less. At first, he aided her from pity and manhood, but later from love. When the day came that she could sit up and move about, they celebrated her recovery joyously together. The weeks flitted on, and she grew once more into her strength and radiant beauty; tattered garments saved from the wreckage were clothes enough.

ALL this while Carvalho saw no other human thing, for the blacks shunned these islets inside the cape. Melusine tried to teach him the use of the goatskin mantles, but he was not at ease in the water, thus enveloped; he left the trick to her.

The ducats of Venice? There were none. Diego had plundered a few coins before the wreckage was scattered by the waves; nothing else. More than once Melusine mentioned some mysterious work on which Diego had been engaged, before he died; Carvalho thought little of it, until one day he learned that the spot lay somewhere amid the thick-

ets at the seaward end of the island. He set forth to explore and find it, from idle curiosity.

Hours later, he came upon the spot, and life was changed abruptly.

It lay close to the shore; in the months since Diego died suddenly from some poisonous thing he had eaten, weather had not affected anything. A clearing, made among the trees, was growing up again; and in the clearing, bottom side up, was a boat. Evidently, Diego had kept the matter secret lest he provoke hope that might be hopeless.

Carvalho stared wide-eyed; with a hoarse cry, he ran upon the boat and examined it. Much work had been done, much remained to do. Here, it seemed, Diego had plundered the wreckage to great purpose, having amassed bits of wood and some cakes of hard tar and sundry other things.

Tears of joy silvered Carvalho's shaggy beard. When he had found the boat sound and good, the worst damage repaired, and under it some casks for water, he turned and went running back to camp. He found Melusine cooking, dragged her away with him, and presently showed her the boat.

"Salvation!" he cried. "Salvation, do you understand? We can get away from here!"

"Whither?" she asked, with no elation. "Only to fall into the hands of savage men?"

This checked him; there was sense to what she said.

"At least, this craft can dare the surf and the sea, which is more than the little skin float can," he rejoined. "We'll not go for the sake of going, dear lady; but here's work to do. If other men come, if Moors come, then we're not caught and trapped."

Always in his mind had grown the fear of other men coming and talking with the black chief, and seeing that golden ducat hanging at his neck. The Portuguese had humored the blacks, but others might not; they would investigate the island of gods, where grew golden Venetian coins—precisely as Carvalho himself had come to investigate.

He fell to upon the boat, which was stoutly built of Portugal oak; he labored with crude tools from dawn to night, and the work grew under his hand, slowly but surely. All his savage energy went into this task.

Now it must be said that these two, being in love, admitted it freely and joy-

ously and as a sacred thing, taking an oath before a cross placed in the sand. They knelt hand in hand before it, and plighted their troth for life and life eternal; and Carvalho did not doubt that Fray Marcos would account this a good deed well done. That the friar would pass upon the matter was not unlikely, since the three ships would return this way on their voyage home. . . .

Carvalho lost count of days. The labor on the boat drew forward; they got the seams well and duly tight, and together managed to launch the craft. It floated stanchly; there was a mast, with cordage, but the canvas Diego had salvaged was all rotted. Two goats remained on the other islet, and the milch-goats here; these Carvalho killed, and from their skins made a sail that was heavy but would serve.

HE was fitting this sail to the mast, of an afternoon, when a sound reached them. His head jerked up.

"A gun!" he exclaimed. "Melusine! Quickly!"

Together they plunged into a path that led across the island to the land side. They emerged, and stood panting, hand in hand. At the river-mouth was a ship, indeed; but fear leaped in Carvalho as he eyed her. It was one of his own three ships, torn and rent by shot, her rigging all awry; and the men aboard her were not the men he knew.

"Moors!" said he, squinting across the sunlight at the tiny figures. A boat was going ashore, where a crowd of blacks were collected. "The Moors have taken our ship, and have put in here to water and refit. Ah—watch!"

The ship's side bloomed smoke; from the boat more arose. The Moors landed, and with the sound of gunfire drifting across the water, attacked the blacks. Many of these, including their chief, were slain, and many others captured and taken for slaves; and the sun went down upon that bloody work.

Carvalho knew well that evil destiny had come upon him; he sat sorrowing that night, for the fate of his comrades. Very early in the morning he swam over toward the ship and heard voices, and so made certain these men were Moors.

Coming back, he worked at the boat, putting aboard her the casks of water and all else that was worth taking, with the mast and hide sail. She was small, and to tempt the horizon of the sea with her would be mad folly; but she might

serve to take them elsewhere along the coast, during the next night. He hoped against hope in this respect; and hope failed.

For, halfway through the day, he descried a pinnace that had towed behind the caravel, coming over toward the island. A big, bluff open boat, her mast broken off by battle, a dozen men at her oars, others crowded in till she was low in the water.

Carvalho ran for the creek entrance. He descried Melusine out between the islands with the goatskin mantle about her; at his shout, she headed in for shore, but she was some distance off. The boat rounded the end of the island as she came. The Moors yelled madly and loosed arrows, but she reached the shallows, threw off the mantle, and dived for the shelter of the trees where Carvalho stood with his weapons.

"Get to shelter and stay hid," said he, winding up the crossbow. A sudden savage light sprang in his eyes. "Ha! Look at that! And look at that man—Luis Gonzaga! Luis, I say!"

Things happened all at once. He had caught sight of a naked white man at the bow oar, one of his own old comrades, now enslaved with the caravel's capture; at the same instant, he saw the pinnace lurch. She was a hundred yards out from shore. The tide was low, and her bluff bow rose high upon a reef, and she tilted.

"Gonzaga!" shouted Carvalho. "It's I, Carvalho! Over and swim for it, man!"

The slave, who had been master gunner aboard the caravel, sprang up. Men were tumbling all about; the Moors were in utmost confusion, and he was overboard and swimming before any of them understood the matter. Then the Moorish leader stood up and bent a bow; but before he loosed the shaft, the heavy twang of Carvalho's crossbow sang upon the air; the quarrel drove through the armored Moor from breast to back, and he toppled into the water.

Luis Gonzaga splashed through the water like a madman. A pistolet roared, but the ball missed. Bowmen recovered balance and poised to shoot; again the crossbow twanged, and this time the massive quarrel pierced two Moors and pinned them in death.

"Too bad your Diego didn't rescue more quarrels!" said Carvalho, as Melusine, in her tattered gown, appeared

beside him. "Back! To cover! Here comes death!"

The pinnacle was hard and fast on the reef; by reason of the island, the Moors on the caravel could not see what happened here, and by reason of the distance could hear nothing. Those aboard the pinnacle, yelling furiously to Allah, were now loosing a storm of shafts, directed chiefly at Carvalho; he slipped aside, and the angry arrows whipped all around him. Luis Gonzaga ducked in the shallows and escaped that storm also.

Three of the heavy Genoese quarrels were left, thick-shanked and iron-headed. Carvalho cranked the bow, laid quarrel in groove, and aimed carefully. To the clang, screams arose; it pierced one man, hurt another.

The furious Moors, their light armor and mesh-coats glinting in the late afternoon light, plied bows again, made frenzied efforts to get the pinnacle loose, and could not. Gonzaga stumbled ashore, arrows whistling after him, and ducked for shelter under the greenery.

"Carvalho! Man, we thought you dead! Good God—who's this?" He started back and crossed himself, at sight of Melusine.

"My wife," said Carvalho. "Take cover before they spit you!"

He cranked the arm of the crossbow. Two quarrels remained, and he made the most of them. By this time, the Moors had lost taste for the death that struck them down. They came over the pinnacle's stern into the water, swords and knives in teeth, and struck out. Some few remained aboard, trying to work off the pinnacle with the heavy sweeps.

CARVALHO threw the crossbow to the sands.

"That's done, but I'm not," he said, and took rapier in one hand, dagger in the other. He drew back, letting the bowmen spend useless shafts trying to find him, and looked at the rescued gunner. "What happened, Luis? How did they take the ship?"

"We were heading back here," said Gonzaga, panting, "and we met four of them. One we sank. One fled. Two others laid the caravel aboard and took us before their damned craft sank under them—our other two ships were too sorely battered to give aid or chase. I'm one of the few left alive. They came over here to investigate the talk of gods and the Venetian gold and put me in to row, with other slaves."

"Then the other two ships are safe?"

"Aye," said Gonzaga, "but badly cut up. They're just the other side of the cape, over yonder—"

"Ha! St. John!" shouted Carvalho, and went striding out across the beach. An arrow flicked at him and missed. Another sang past his ear; then no more, for the first of the Moors was on his feet and plunging ashore, and the bowmen on the pinnacle dared fire no longer.

THE Moor came wading in, but Carvalho waded out to meet him and thus had the advantage of footing and breath and height.

"Allah!" yelled the Moor. The rapier pricked through his throat and changed the yell to a bubbling groan, and the swarthy warrior pitched over.

Two others came splashing in, hot behind him. Carvalho engaged these with sword and dirk, the tide swirling around knees and ankles. One Moor lost footing, and the dagger smote down through his back. The other man, slashed across the eyes by the sword-point, turned away and went reeling up to the beach, holding a hand across his eyes and screaming.

Luis Gonzaga brained him with the heavy crossbow and took his weapons, but Carvalho did not see this, for now he was backing away, three of the Moors leaping at him.

There he fought them warily, looking into the dark bearded faces, meeting the savage eyes, giving thrust for thrust, parrying with the long dagger, keeping away from them with swift feet. One took a thrust and went down. Two others came splashing up to take his place, and had cut Carvalho off from any retreat, when suddenly Gonzaga was in upon them with a yell and a thirsty blade.

Now befell work of the deadliest, the sunset glinting from fast-whipping steel, the sand flying underfoot. Carvalho kept to the wet strip above the low tidemark, thus having solid footing. Blood was running down his face from a slash over the head, his arms were bleeding, Luis Gonzaga was down with a ripped thigh; but the Moors fared worst. Two died quickly, a third coughed his life away, another was hamstrung and crippled like a screaming horse. One stumbled; Gonzaga grappled him and stabbed him as they rolled in the hot white sand.

Then it was over. These were devils, not men, cried the Moors, and gave back.

Besides, the men in the pinnace were yelling at them—they had her off, floating, but she was making water fast and most of their sweeps had drifted away. So those that remained turned about and plunged again, swimming for her.

Gonzaga, having finished his man, put his point through the throat of the wounded Moor, and went staggering up the beach for Melusine to bandage his hurt. Carvalho, panting, leaned on the red rapier and watched the pinnace go limping around the island end in the sunset glow.

In an hour or less, darkness would envelop earth and sea. In an hour or less, the land breeze would be up, blowing out to sea. In an hour or less, that pinnace would return, crowded with Moors—

"Carvalho!" Melusine came to him, with a wet rag and bits of cloth torn from her gown. "Your hurts—let me at them. Ah, poor man!"

"Poor Moors, you mean!" said Carvalho, with a fierce laugh as he regarded the corpses in the wash of the tide. She caught swiftly at his face, making him look her in the eyes.

"Listen! Did you hear what this man said?" She jerked her head toward Luis Gonzaga.

"Eh? What of it?"

"Everything!" She blazed with sudden excitement. "Your other two ships repairing their damages—there, there! Just the other side of the long cape! Don't you understand? We can put out in the boat now, when darkness comes down, and reach them with tomorrow's dawn—"

Carvalho started. He had failed to comprehend much that Gonzaga had uttered. Now he caught her meaning. His pulses leaped. With a quick movement, his hurt arm encircled her.

"Ha! By St. John, you've hit it! The Moors will land here. We'll put out from the other end of the island and be gone before they find us, in the darkness—"

The sun was gone under the ocean. Darkness stole down; the greenish sky deepened to blue, then the stars faded, everything faded. There was only a blank wall of stone. . . . Then the room lights flashed on again.

"WELL!" said Fletcher, with an air of satisfaction. "That's one of the best demonstrations I've ever obtained. It shows how the myth of mermaids

arose, in this one variant of the story, and why, and the channel by which it reached the world. Like many another fable and legend, we owe it to protection."

"Protective coloration," corrected the Padre, smiling. "The genius of the oppressed. But what, may I ask, became of the two lovers?"

"I've been unable to obtain more information on that subject, at least directly," said Norman Fletcher. He took another paper from his instrument-board and handed it over. "But here's the indirect answer. A curious old engraving that came from Portuguese sources."

OUR foursome clustered about the engraving, showing two subjects. One, to a casual glance, looked something like a flying fish. The other showed a rather horrible monster, until one inspected it more closely and perceived that it was actually a mermaid, holding back a sort of mantle.

"Why—upon my word!" exclaimed the Padre. "This is actually an illustration of your story, Fletcher! It represents the mermaid enfolded in her mantle, viewed from above; and also viewed from below, with the mantle thrown back!"

Fletcher nodded.

"Precisely. One of the few documentary evidences extant, in regard to such fables. With due allowance for a confoundedly poor artist, he got his details from an eye-witness. Undoubtedly, from Carvalho or his wife. Naturally, they would keep quiet about her own part in the matter—in those days, anything that smacked of wizardry led to the stake."

We examined the two pictures. Heise, the banker, grunted and settled back in his chair.

"I still claim it's all nonsense," he said stubbornly. "This thing we've just seen—what was it, Fletcher? A magic-lantern trick? Of course it wasn't real."

There was a rather nasty undertone in his voice. Norman Fletcher, smoothing back his white hair, replied with his usual affability.

"You've heard the old story, Mr. Heise, about the yokel who viewed a giraffe for the first time, in a circus parade. 'There just aint no sech animile!' said he, and stuck to it. You are of course entitled to your opinion, for which I have the greatest deference."

And Heise had the grace to blush.

A brilliant story based on the myth of the Serpent People will appear soon.

The Truth About

The strange pilgrimage of a Wyoming Huckleberry Finn.

The Story Thus Far:

LAST month I told you about when I was riding on a train with my father, and at a little station in Wyoming two men came up to us, and Pa turned kind of sickly green, and said: "Well, well, if it aint my two old friends Mr. Law and Mr. Marshal!" Then he told me that he had business with these men, and that I was to go on by myself to my Aunt Susy in San Francisco. And he got off the train with the two men.

I didn't have any Aunt Susy that I knew about, but Pa had taught me not to act surprised at anything queer like that he said when strangers were around. He and Limpy Joe and Weasel was always pretty careful with strangers around, except when they'd been drinking; then I'd have to dodge the bottles they threw.

Pretty soon a tall man, a ranchman, came and sat down by me, and talked to me, and found out I didn't have any Aunt Susy. And then he said wouldn't I like to come with him and live at the U Cross and learn to be a cowboy. That sounded pretty good, and I didn't know what else to do; once before when Pa had gone off with two men, I'd been taken to an Orphan's Home, and that wasn't so good.

Well, it was just about perfect at the U Cross. I had my own pony Sinful to ride; and Aunt Emmy—that was Sam's wife—was powerful good to me; and at Christmas they gave me a twenty-two to shoot prairie-dogs with. Lester Touch-the-Clouds the educated Indian cowboy taught me sign-talk; and Beavertooth told me the gaudiest lies; and old Stan and Bignose George and Lester won a horse-race against a ringer race-horse the town folks had, by staking out a tame bear in the brush so that the smell of him got the town horse spooked up.

But there was trouble in the air too, on account of feeling between the cattle-men and the sheep-men. And one night Lester came in wounded: Some men had bush-whacked him. (*The story continues in detail:*)

AFTER a while Sam said Lester needed quiet and sleep, so everybody went to bed. After they left, Lester called Sam



Gilead Skaggs

By JAMES EDWIN BAUM





"Beavertooth is a lot hon-
ester when he lies," said
Aunt Emmy.

back. They had put Lester in a room right across a narrow hallway from my room, and when Sam went back in, they forgot me and I could hear everything.

Lester was talking: "No, Sam, I've thought and studied it all out since them neighbors rode over and tried to make you get rid of me on account of the beef-killing, and I—"

Sam butted in: "Who in hell blabbed all that truck?"

I was scared because I could tell by Sam's voice that he was awful thundering mad, and would of made it hot for whoever told it, which was me. But Lester says, mighty prompt:

"Don't get a wrong idea, Sam. Nobody on this ranch said *one word* about it!"—which was the truth, because I had told him in the sign language. And Lester went on: "Remember Sam, I've got plenty wide-awake friends and relatives on the Reservation." You can bet it took a load off me when he let Sam think some Injun had blabbed it!

"Yes," Lester says, "after the cow-

men come here that day and tried to hang that beef-butcherin' on me, I made up my mind to quit you. But I hated to leave the U Cross, and I put it off and stayed on. Now, you see, I hung on too long. Them men today weren't sheep-men; it's cow-men who want me so special."

"Yes," Sam says, "if the sheep-men was ready for war, they wouldn't begin by bushwhacking a lone cowpuncher. They'd throw a band of snoozers across the deadline and set down all peaceable and wait for the cow-men to make the first break. Then they'd be in plumb solid with the law. They've got the law, such as it is, on their side now. And they've got sense enough to keep it there. No, it weren't sheep-men a-smoking you up. It must of been a pair of jackass rattle-headed cow-men who think all Injuns is beef-killers because maybe a few knock over a critter once in a while."

"That's the way I figger it, and that's why I had decided to quit a month ago. A sheep and cattle war is coming sure, and the cow-men have got to stand together. The U Cross would be in a bad jackpot, playing a lone hand, if I got you in heap trouble with the other cow-men!"

"Forget it! The U Cross can take care of itself!"

But Lester knowed he was right, and went on: "This shooting today means big trouble with the law. An Injun wouldn't have a chance after killing a white man, and I think I got one of them. I'll take a little rest here now, and at daylight you loan me a horse. I know a hide-out where they'll never find me. This wound don't amount to nothing. My cousin, Bird's Nest, can bring me grub and whatever I need until it heals."

SAM took a long time to think before I heard him say:

"In the morning take any horse on the ranch and never mind sending him back, either. I've got more saddle-horses than I know what to do with. Stay hid, until I pass the word to Bird's Nest that things has blowed over. We can't tell yet just which way they'll jump, but I'll keep you posted through your cousin."

They talked some more, and then Sam went back to bed, and I reckon Lester went to sleep. But there weren't much sleep for me that night. What Lester said about him dragging Sam and the U Cross into bad trouble made me think some about myself. I had almost forgot what the race-horse expert proved; how

men was just like horses, and a boy always took after his father.

Now it all come back to me as I laid there wide awake. And I thought: if Lester is ready to quit the ranch to save Sam and the U Cross from trouble, then I've got to do the same. What a awful thing it would be for the U Cross and everybody if the old man's blood took to raging around in me some day soon—and I knowed it was *bound* to sooner or later—and made me jump out and murder a whole raft of neighbors without no cause! Yes, it would be a heap sight better for everybody if I pulled out, too. And I ought to do it quick, before that blood had a chance to start me on the butcherings it must have all planned and lined-up for me.

Well, I thought and thought and decided there weren't but one fair and square thing I *could* do; and that was to leave right away, while there was still time. I thought at first I'd go with Lester in the morning and look after him while his wound was bad. I thought I'd just tell Sam everything and explain why I was a-leaving. But when I thought some more, I was almost sure he wouldn't let me go. He'd try to smooth things over and comfort me and say the old man's blood couldn't make me do them things if I fought agin it hard. That would *sound* good, but I knowed enough—after what the race-horse man and all the others said—to know it wouldn't be the truth. No, I *had* to foller right in the old man's tracks and be just like him. And if Lester was man enough to leave to save everybody trouble, and him only a Injun, then it was up to me, dead sure, to leave too.

I decided not to say nothing to nobody, not even Lester. The best plan was to wait a day or two, give Lester a chance to get to his hide-out, then just ease away from the ranch early in the morning before anybody was up. But I wouldn't do it without leaving a note for Sam and Aunt Emmy, telling *why* I had to do it.

CHAPTER VI

I WENT to sleep after a long time; and when I woke up, the sun was two hours high and Lester had been gone since before daylight.

Well, now that I had to leave in a day or two, there was plenty of things I wanted to do first. I had that letter to write telling Sam and Aunt Emmy how I was doing the right thing by leaving

under the circumstantial. I had to tie up some extra clothes and my catridges and a few mink and mushrat traps, and fix 'em all in a bundle that I could carry on my saddle.

I told in the letter how I knowed the old man's blood was certain-sure to start in on me soon. And I didn't soften it up, neither, but told what a cold-blooded killer I was slated to be, and I proved it, too, by what had happened in that dream. And I told 'em how lucky they was to get rid of me before that blood made me start, because, I said, once I got my hand in a-murdering folks, nobody nor *nothing* couldn't stop me. It was a long letter, and I hid it under some shirts in my drawer till I got ready to leave.

AFTER supper that evening Sam and Old Stan was talking at one end of the table, and Sam says:

"Well, I reckon Lester is hived away safe and sound by this time. I told him not to hang around and waste time with his relations at the Reservation, but to see Bird's Nest and hightail it right on through. It's queer no posse nor no sheriff nor nothing has showed up around here. What do you make of it, Stan?"

"Well," says Stan, "you can bet the bushwhacker who weren't shot aint proud of his part in it. Maybe he kept still. Or maybe Lester didn't kill nobody after all. The one that took a tumble might of fell over a rock or tripped over a sage-bush when Lester shot; I've knowed that to happen. And maybe nobody but Lester got hurt. And if a posse is out, they might be working through the foothills and the mountains. But I don't mind telling you—I aint at all easy in my mind about Lester."

A minute later Old Stan jumped up from his chair like a pinch-bug had bit him and took to limping around the room.

"Sam," he says, and his old, wrinkled and gnarly face was a-glowing. "Sam, I've got an idea! We'll draw the fangs from any sheriff's posse that might take the trail after him; we'll put a spoke in their wheel! And here's how: They all say that a *dead* Injun is a good Injun. We'll prove to 'em that Lester is a good Injun; we'll dig a grave and *bury* him!"

Sam whacked the table—*ker-plunk!*—with his fist. Two saucers at the other end busted to smithereens. But Aunt Emmy never even glanced that way. She seen what old Stan was a-driving at.

Old Stan went on: "We'll dig a grave



on a knoll behind the corral, and knock together a pine coffin and load her with rocks to weigh about right, and enough dirt so the rocks won't rattle. We'll keep it for a few days in the front room, right handy, but nailed up tight. We'll be ready to pull off the funeral at the drop of a hat. If a posse drifts in, in the next day or two, we can start the show when we see 'em coming. By the time they get here and climb down off'n their hosses, we'll be hard at it, a-lowering the coffin into the grave and shoveling in dirt; and you, Sam, can be reading from the Book and throwing in a few kind words of your own for pore Lester. It'll be too late for anybody to open up the box to have a look, and nobody wouldn't be likely to think of it, no way. But if a smart-alec of a sheriff wants to throw off the dirt and open her up to make sure—we'll ring in the law on *him*! It takes a dozen different kinds of lawyers to make you dig up anybody *after* he's once been planted. It's too complicated and they wouldn't bother with it.

"But all this is just scenery in case they come here tomorrow or next day, which aint none likely. I don't believe the law will be drug in on this at all. But I *do* believe a fairly sizable band of chuckleheads will get together on the quiet and make a mighty determined

hunt for Lester. Them are the dangerous ones. But we can yank *their* fangs, too, and easy enough:

"Let George ride to town tomorrow and buy a flag to wrap Lester's body in—Lester is one of the original Americans. George can be sure to mention *why* he wants that flag. He can tell how Lester come home and died of his wound. And George can say that Lester's last request before he shoved off was to be buried at the U Cross like a white man, that Lester had give up all Injun ghost-dancing and medicine-man beliefs and took up the white man's beliefs after he went to that college in the East. (Them town knot-heads don't know that a Injun is always a Injun and never can be a white man, any more than they know that some Injuns is good and some is bad, the same as any other breed of folks.) After they listen to George, they'll be sure Lester is dead and out of the way forever; and they'll pass the word all over the country. And so there won't be no dangerous, half-baked Injun-haters prowling around in the hills after him."

Everybody, even Aunt Emmy, was awful tickled with the idea, and she says: "Yes, and George can spread himself when he comes to the part about Lester's



I made the friendly sign, and the old stager grunted and made the friendly sign himself.

last requests. . . . But no—wait a minute! We've made one mistake. Beavertooth ought to go for that flag! Beavertooth is a lot honester when he lies than George is. And you can tell 'em, Beavertooth, that the Injun school he went to had smoothed him out wonderful, until he was so tender-hearted and it was so much agin his better nature to slap a hot iron on a critter, that we had no end of trouble with him every time we branded. And you can say—"

But Beavertooth had been restless and fidgety while she was telling him what to say, and now he couldn't stand it no longer!

"Missus Bowman," he says, kind of offended, "you a-telling *me* how to lie reminds me of somebody wasting time telling a range-cow how to find her calf; as if she couldn't find it among ten thousand!" Everybody laughed, even Aunt Emmy; and she says:

"Well, I reckon it *is* like dipping water out of the ocean with a teacup."

Well, they talked over the funeral plans for another hour and got 'em down pat, almost as good as a soldier-drill. And Beavertooth was to leave for town in the morning and start his lies going

the rounds. When I knowed for sure they had decided on Beavertooth as official liar for the outfit, I knowed Lester would get all the chances they was.

But in spite of that, it was a terrible hard evening for me. When I looked around the room at everybody, I almost give up my plans a dozen times. Here was Sam and Old Stan, and Beavertooth and George, talking quiet and serious, a-whipping and driving their brains to make things safe for Lester. And Aunt Emmy doing *her* best too, throwing in suggestions and straining her brains, and all for Lester, who was only a Injun after all.

Well, *them* was the kind of friends I was leaving forever! And now I wouldn't hear Beavertooth talk and lie no more. And I can tell you it was all I could do to set there and think about it and not break down and bawl. I went off to bed early. I couldn't stand it no more. And I bawled some, too, when I got to my room. But I didn't make much noise about it, and I aint ashamed of it.

The moon was just coming up and almost full, and I waited till I heard everybody go to bed. Then I got up and dressed and took the letter from my drawer and shoved it under the sheet.

When I had hid the letter, I climbed out through the winder with my spare clothes and catridges and mink and mushrat traps crammed into the legs of a extra pair of overalls and tied up tight. I had hid my twenty-two under some hay in the barn.



Lester Touch-the-Clouds.

I injuned out to the barn and saddled up Sinful. Then I tied everything on my saddle, slipped my rifle in the scabbard George had made for me a long time ago, and led Sinful out the back way behind the corral where the ground was soft and his hoofs wouldn't make noise. When I got far enough from the house, I climbed on.

When I topped the hill behind the corral, I stopped to take one last look at the ranch. But I felt so bad and so lonesome, with everybody sleeping so still and contented in the house, and somebody in the bunkhouse snoring away like a shingle-mill, happy as could be—and me out there in the cold, spooky moonlight getting lonesomer and lonesomer—I didn't hardly dare to look back! And something like a cow's cud come up in my throat and stuck there.

Well, I set in the saddle a long, long time looking at the U Cross in the bright moonlight. I reckon, at a time like that when you are leaving almost everything in the world forever, your brains is mighty likely to get soft and take to milling around in your head. I thought of everything. I even thought about the brick Home where they had me hived away the first time the old man was took. And I remembered what they had told me there about heaven. I didn't think much of it then; I didn't think much of it now. All you can do in their heaven is to loll around for a million years on a fleecy white and awful clean cloud, or sail around on wings dressed up in a white nightgown, and pick at a harp or some other music. It sounded like a pretty sickly place.

Then I remembered what I had heard Old Stan and Beavertooth say about the Injun Happy Hunting-ground, and I hoped I would go there. That's the boss place! Why, all you have to do there is swing aboard your favorite buffalo-horse every morning, and all ready and waiting for you to chase, is a big herd of buffalo. You pour the leather into your horse, let out a whoop and take after 'em. You run buffalo every single day if you're a mind to. And you don't do a tap of work, and they never heard of book-learning. And when you jog back home to your tepee all tired and bloody, nobody makes you wash, and a dozen or so of your favorite squaws unsaddle your horse and fetch you elk or buffalo-meat or whatever you want, and they're just crazy to do it, too. And in the Happy Hunting-ground they let in only the beautifulest squaws and don't bother with the others. In the evening you set around the fire with your friends and swap stories of hunting and fighting. And you can lie all you're a mind to, and cuss too, and nobody gives a hoop. But I dasn't waste time right then thinking about it, good as it sounded. So I quit, and kicked Sinful into a lope, and tried to swaller whatever was in my neck.

WE hit a good pace, hour after hour, loping sometimes, and walking some to let Sinful get his wind. After a long time the moon went down in the west, and it was so black, and the darkness was so thick it seemed you could carve it up in chunks with a knife. Pretty soon a cold breeze come a-sifting and whispering along, and the stars low down in the east got weak and sickly-looking and twinkled more like a candle when it's almost burnt out. Then the stars higher up got pale too, as if that sickness was catching, like smallpox. And after a while long streaks and fingers of light crawled straight up from the mountain-tops; like God or somebody was a-reaching up to snuff out them star-candles. Whoever was doing it doused the lower ones first, and then, awful slow and gradual, the fingers of light reached higher and higher, up and up, and snuffed more and more stars, and the star-sickness spread all over, sideways and everywhere, till even the brightest ones over my head caught it. It took a long time, but it was all so steady and sure and official—and it was done so almighty silent—you couldn't help thinking that Whoever was a-doing it knowed His

business. And the stars looked like they knowed they was whipped and just set there and took it and didn't fight agin it—and no wonder; it was bound to happen, so why try to duck out of it? *Their* fix was a lot like mine with the old man's blood ready to reach out after *me*. Nobody but a chicken-brain would fight agin what was all planned and arranged a mighty long time ago, and was *bound* to happen, no matter what you done.

Well, not long after it got broad daylight I see three Injun lodges a-standing on a level flat, with a small band of ponies grazing around. Smoke was coming from a hole in the top of one tepee, so I rode up to it. While I was still a long ways off, a old buck Injun with long hair and a blanket thrown around him stepped outside and stood a-watching me. I rode up and says:

"I'm a-looking for Bird's Nest, cousin of Lester Touch-the-Clouds. Do you know where he's at?"

The old man never give a sign that he even heard. So I knowed that he couldn't talk white-man. So I tried him in sign. I made the friendly sign, and when the old stager seen my right hand with the first two fingers sticking up, held in front of my neck and then raised slow, straight up, even with the top of my head, he grunted and made the friendly sign himself. Only he done it faster and kept right on with other signs, so graceful and easy it was awful pretty to watch. His hands moved so fast I couldn't catch all the signs, but I made out enough. His hands says: "I am friendly. There is plenty meat in the tepee. Get down and eat. The squaw will take your pony." I made the sign for "Good," and slid off.

HE stuck his head in the tepee and grunted. A young squaw come out the round opening, give me a smile that flashed, and took my bridle reins. She had on a dress of bright colors, and a belt of big round disks which Injuns pound out of silver dollars. She led Sinful around behind the lodge and tied him up. And she done it quicker and maybe better than I could do it. And I thought: here would be a jim-dandy of a squaw to have in the Happy Hunting-ground, and maybe a few dozen more like her. A man wouldn't have to lift a hand with a bunch like her around.

A pot of meat was boiling on the fire, and the old man give me the sign to eat. The young squaw took a big iron spoon and slapped a hunk of steaming meat

and plenty of juice on a tin pan and handed it to me. There weren't no forks and spoons; Injuns don't put on frills with their meals. So when it cooled some, I et with my fingers, which was clean enough to suit anybody.

Well, after I polished off my breakfast, I asked the old buck in sign where I could find Bird's Nest. He stood up and pointed almost straight north, forked the first two fingers of his right hand over his left and made the left jump like a galloping horse. He led me to the lodge-opening, took a squint at the sun and pointed to where it would be in two hours. So I knowed I could find Bird's Nest's tepee by riding north two hours.

I THANKED the old man in sign, and the young squaw brought Sinful, and I set out. In a couple of hours I come over a hill, and below, along another creek, was six lodges.

It was easy enough to find the tepee Bird's Nest hung out in. Me and Sinful went over to it, and just then Bird's Nest himself come out. I knowed him right away. There was something about him that reminded me of Lester. He was a lot younger, maybe only nineteen or twenty, but he was tall and straight, and his hair was long. He didn't wear a blanket but had on a pair of old overalls, moccasins and a black shirt—a shirt so jet black that his folks couldn't tell when it was dirty and keep a-both'ring him to change it, which showed he was smart.

Well, he stood still as a rock for a whole minute or two in front of me before he said a word. But his beady eyes was sizing me up from my ears to my toes. His head didn't crane around on his neck, like a white man's would if *he* was looking you over; his head never moved, but his little black eyes was a-darting every whichaway.

Finally he says:

"How."

"How," I says, and stuck out my hand. He shook it kind of limp, like it was a wet rag; he weren't used to shaking hands. I pointed to my chest:

"Me, U Cross—Gillie."

"How, Gillie!" And his thin lips kind of half-smiled.

He was crafty as could be. He didn't let on to me that he even knowed Lester had been wounded or left the U Cross or nothing. Bird's Nest took down the rope on my saddle,* tied it around Sinful's neck, and with the other end in his hand, lifted the flap, and we went inside. A

buck, a lot older than Bird's Nest, probably his father, was laying propped-up on a willer back-rest that hung from a tripod of sticks behind his head. He was smoking a long-stem pipe of red stone, and he never even turned his head when I come in. No squaws was around. I reckon they was off fetching wood or water or doing the chores.

Bird's Nest spread a hide on the ground and we set down.

I says: "Sam sent me with big medicine-news for Lester. Sam said: 'Gillie, you round up Bird's Nest. Make him take you to Lester. And don't you tell nobody this big medicine-news, not even Bird's Nest. Even if they drowned you, Gillie, you tell *nobody* but Lester!'"

THAT kind of set Bird's Nest back on his heels. He didn't say nothing for maybe five minutes. Just set there a-thinking and studying and ciphering in his mind if it was safe to take me to Lester's hide-out. I reckon Lester had beat it into Bird's Nest's head that he weren't to let nobody know where that hide-out was. You can bet anything you're a-mind to I made the news I was supposed to have look mighty important to Bird's Nest. I says:

"If Lester don't hear this hell-awful thundering big medicine-news I've got for him, then maybeso Lester goes to sleep some night soon, and sheriffs and marshals and cow-men and soldiers, pony-soldiers and walk-a-heaps, surround his camp and set down behind their big boom-boom guns on wheels, guns that shoot today and kill next week, and their little spit-spit, chatter-chatter bang-sticks that shoot ten million times a minute—and all them guns will speak, together at once—*Bim! Bam! Bang! Boom!*—and Lester is—" And then I stole some stuff from one of Beavertooth's lies, which I was already beginning to miss cruel; I says: "And Lester aint there no more. And he aint *gone* no place. He—just—aint—there—no—more! Lester is blowed to a million pieces, and spattered over the scenery from here to Kingdom Come!"

I don't know how much of it Bird's Nest understood. But enough. It threwed a powerful bad chill into him. He jabbered a long string of Injun to the other buck, and *he* got excited too. They talked back and forth, wild-eyed, for a few minutes. Oh, they was dead sure now that I knowed something so thumping big that they dasn't refuse to hump

themselves and take me to Lester. Bird's Nest made one try to get it out of me:

"You tell me, Gillie. I go find Lester, *pronto!*"

"No," I says, hard as iron. "I tell *nobody*, only Lester!" And I set there on my hams like I had all day to waste, and like it weren't no skin off my nose if they didn't ever want Lester to know about this big danger a-sneaking up.

Well, it didn't take 'em long to make up their minds. Bird's Nest hopped up, stuck his head outside the tepee, let out a long whoop, and a boy about my size set out on a dead run for a band of ponies grazing along a hillside. In no time he caught a gentle pony, twisted a rawhide thong around its under-jaw, mounted and drove in the herd. Bird's Nest shoved a couple of hunks of jerked meat into a pocket of his overalls, and I done the same. He slapped a wide hat on his head and took down a quirt hanging from one of the lodge-poles and picked up an old bridle. He didn't have no saddle. And he slung an otter-skin quiver with a bow and arrows in it over his shoulder. There was three or four blankets, pretty greasy-looking, laying against the side of the tepee. He took one and gave me one, and we was ready. The other buck lit his pipe again and leaned on his willer back-rest, like nothing had happened. I reckon he stayed behind ready to give the wrong directions to any sheriffs that might come along. And if he couldn't do it, nobody could.

Bird's Nest picked out a strong pinto from the bunch, walked up to him slow and easy and slipped on the bridle. He wound a lass-rope around and around his horse's neck to use as a picket-rope at night, and mounted with one jump, from the off-side, like a Injun always does. I rolled my blanket and tied it on the saddle, but Bird's Nest carried hisn throwed across his horse's withers in front of him.

CHAPTER VII

WE rode until after dark that night. All afternoon, while there was still enough light, Bird's Nest had watched the ground, and when he seen horse-tracks, always looked 'em over as careful as could be. It weren't no trick for him to find out any amount of news from a few tracks. He could tell the track of a Injun pony from the mark of a bigger American horse, the kind sheriffs and marshals would be riding, as easy as fall-

ing off a log. He could tell by follering a track only a short ways and studying and ciphering it out, just what the rider of that horse was up to. If the rider was going somewhere special, Bird's Nest said, the tracks would head fairly straight for some pass and choose the best ground. But if he was scouting around and looking for something, or somebody, then the tracks would lead to high points and knolls, and the ground would show where the horse stood still while the man had a long look over the country.

We seen only a few fresh horse-tracks, and they was made by loose range-horses. You could tell they was loose by the way the tracks wandered around and didn't keep a set direction, and by the bunches of grass bit off short beside the tracks. Once he showed me the marks of Lester's horses. Lester had taken a pack-horse from Bird's Nest's string to carry grub and a tepee.

ABOUT an hour after dark we led our horses through a patch of thick timber to a grassy park and staked 'em out where the feed was good. We laid down behind a fallen log, out of the breeze, and wrapped the blankets around us. Nobody but a half-wit would light a fire, no matter how cold it got. Three or four times in the night Bird's Nest pulled up the picket-pins and drove 'em in a new place so the ponies could find fresh grass. I didn't get much sleep that night. I got so shivery and cold I'd wake. And just before daylight it got so thundering cold you had to stomp around and swing your arms and run back and forth to keep warm.

We pulled out again at daylight, gnawing at a handful of that jerky, as we rode. Jerky aint much if you're fussy and looking for taste; it's dry and hard and tough. But after you've chawed up and swallowed a little, you'd be surprised how it gives you strength to keep going; and of course it don't weigh nothing to carry.

We rode steady most of the day, climbing higher and higher in the mountains. Sometimes we come to the edge of cliffs, and rode along for a ways looking down at the yeller plains, miles and miles below. Little creeks flowed from almost every small cañon or draw, and started out across the plains. And you could see how they gradually come together; first maybe two or three would join, then others joined *them*, and pretty soon, away out on the plains, miles below, all them dozens of tiny creeks made a pretty

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon



sizable river, and away it went, a-winding, turning and twisting, as far as you could see, its course marked plain by a thin line of green cottonwood trees along the banks.

When you looked over one of the high cliffs at the whole world spread out at your feet, it made you feel little, and weak, and no account, as if you didn't amount to nothing and was just about as important as a chipmunk. I never see anything like it to take a man down, and put him in his place, and let him know there was things a lot bigger than *him* in this world! All your troubles stacked up pretty small when you stood there on top of the world and seen what God, or Somebody, could do when He put his mind to it and really tried. It give you a feeling that no matter what *you* might be able to do in your whole life, it wouldn't amount to shucks.

I reckon Bird's Nest felt the same about it. While we rested after a steep climb, he stood for a spell and looked straight into the sun, and talked and muttered to it in dead earnest. If he was

a-praying, it didn't do him no good, because not five minutes later a loose stone turned under his horse's hoof, and the pinto fell and throwed Bird's Nest hard—spraddled him out and scuffed a layer of hide off his shoulder. It kind of loosened him up too, and he began to talk, and talked more than he had the whole way.

He said a jolt of bad luck was coming to him. He had been expecting it, and if this was all there was to it, he was getting off easy, because only three days before he had been dreadful foolish and criminal-careless, and done a thing no man in his right senses would *think* of doing a-purpose. It was a wonder he weren't hurled over the cliff, and he probably would of been, he said, if he hadn't brushed away most of the bad-luck with a branch of sacred white-sage. He said he was squatting by the fire in his father's tepee that time, and before he realized what his hands was doing, he had tapped several times with the butt of his quirt on a stick *while it was burning!* When he seen what a risky thing he had done, you bet he jumped up and run out and got some white-sage and brushed off everything in the tepee and dropped some sage-leaves on the fire and washed his hands in the smoke. But he thought maybe he had overlooked brushing the bad-luck off his bridle, or the quirt itself, and so his pony had fell with him.

Nobody ever told me before that you was just begging for trouble and bad luck if you tapped on a burning stick. And I said so. Bird's Nest thought I was the awfulest liar—or just a plain fool—when I said I never knowed *that*—a thing his people had *always* knowed, a thing any papoose ought to know as soon as it can walk. Bird's Nest was a heap smarter about such things than anybody I ever see, even Bignose George.

WE was so high in the mountains now, it was cold even when the sun was shining. And a lot of the time our way was so steep we had to scramble up afoot and lead our ponies. Late in the afternoon we reached the top of a high divide. On one side all the streams flowed east, and on the other they flowed west. Bird's Nest said that one set went to one ocean and the other set to another ocean, and you could start here if you had a canoe, and if the streams was bigger, and float down, and down, and down, and after months and months, or maybe years, you'd come a'drifting out

into a ocean on the *east* side of All-the-land-in-the-World. And if you floated down any creek on the other slope, you'd wind up in another ocean on the *west* side of All-the-land-in-the-World.

I asked him what was on the other side of them oceans. He said there weren't no other side to *any* ocean, which was the reason they *was* oceans and not lakes. There wouldn't be no use in a ocean, he said, if there was land on the other side of it. He quit talking pretty soon, and then there weren't no rousing him. When a Injun goes into one of his silent spells, you might as well ask your questions to a horse.

So I kept quiet too and went to thinking. There was another big problem coming up soon—it seemed that *something* always needed figgering out: How could I get Lester to let me stay after we found his hide-out? If he thought I had left the ranch in the night without telling nobody, he'd be dead sure to send me back a-hooping.

AT first, when I couldn't think of no other way, I decided to tell Lester the truth—to just up and tell him all about the old man's blood, and explain that I had left the U Cross so Sam and Aunt Emmy and everybody wouldn't be drug down and disgraced when I started on the wholesale butcherings that was lined up and cut out for me. But after a while, as me and Bird's Nest rode deeper into the mountains, I changed my mind. The truth is mighty shaky any time, like dreams, and liable to go back on you and twist your plans around and put you in a bad light. I says to myself:

Why, just look back and see where you'd be if you had told *Sam* the truth! He'd of argued you out of your plans, sure as shooting. And you'd be at the U Cross this minute, expecting that blood to crack the whip over you any day. And maybe it would of done it before now, and you would already be a murderer, and a bloody one too, and all because you blabbed the truth and didn't have better sense than to monkey with something that was none of your business. And where would you be if you hadn't told Bird's Nest all that rigmarole about sheriffs and marshals and pony-soldiers and walk-a-heaps a-sneaking up on Lester? You wouldn't be no place but a-setting right back there in Bird's Nest's lodge until Sam come and got you. That's where you'd be!

No, after thinking it over mighty

careful and reasonable, I knowed I didn't have no business messing around with the truth and running risks that weren't necessary. So I made up my mind to let Bird's Nest talk first when we got to Lester's camp. Bird's Nest was sure to tell Lester all I had told him about marshals and sheriffs and soldiers. He would make it awful good, too; maybe do it better than I could, because he was pretty scared when I was a-telling *him*.

It was almost sundown when Bird's Nest pulled up his horse and let out a long, quavering, "*Yip-yip-yip-ow-ow-oo-oo-oo-oooo*." We listened a minute, and pretty soon here come the answer; no white man would of knowed in a million years it weren't a coyote. We slid off our ponies and led 'em down the steep slope, and just before we got to the creek at the bottom, Lester stepped out from behind a big rock. His thirty-thirty was ready in his right hand, and his left side was still tied up in the bandage Sam and old Stan had put on it.

Bird's Nest begun jabbering in Injun. And I was sure it was what I had told him; about sheriffs and pony-soldiers ready to sneak on this cañon and blast things into a million pieces.

When Bird's Nest finished, Lester turned to me:

"Gillie, where did you hear all that stuff you told Bird's Nest?"

I LET words almost explode out of me. I had to spread myself and make it good, or I'd be sent home a-hooping. I says:

"I don't know nothing,"—which was the truth so far,—“only that Sam grabbed me by the shoulder when George come from town and got through whispering him something. Well, Sam grabbed me, and he was awful, powerful excited. He says: ‘Gillie! Throw your saddle on Sinful as fast as the Lord'll let you, and hit for the Reservation! Gouge the stuffing out of that pony's ribs all the way. Find Bird's Nest and make him take you to Lester. He knows where Lester is hid. Tell Lester to fade clean out of the country. Tell him there is hell to pay, with sheriffs and marshals from everywhere ready to drag this country with a fine-tooth comb. And Gillie, you stay with Lester till his wound heals. After his wound is healed and he's safe out of the country—then you can think about coming back to the U Cross.’”

I don't know how much of it Lester swallowed, because just then, from away

off across the cañon come a faint, "*Yip-yip-ow-ow-oo-ooo*." Bird's Nest and Lester froze and stood, still as the trees, listening. I says, right quick:

"That weren't no white man! Maybe they have brung Injun trailers from the Reservation. A Injun could do it that good."

This coyote howl coming right on the heels of what I had told 'em about hell a-busting loose was too much for even a Injun. They talked low in Injun, and then Lester says:

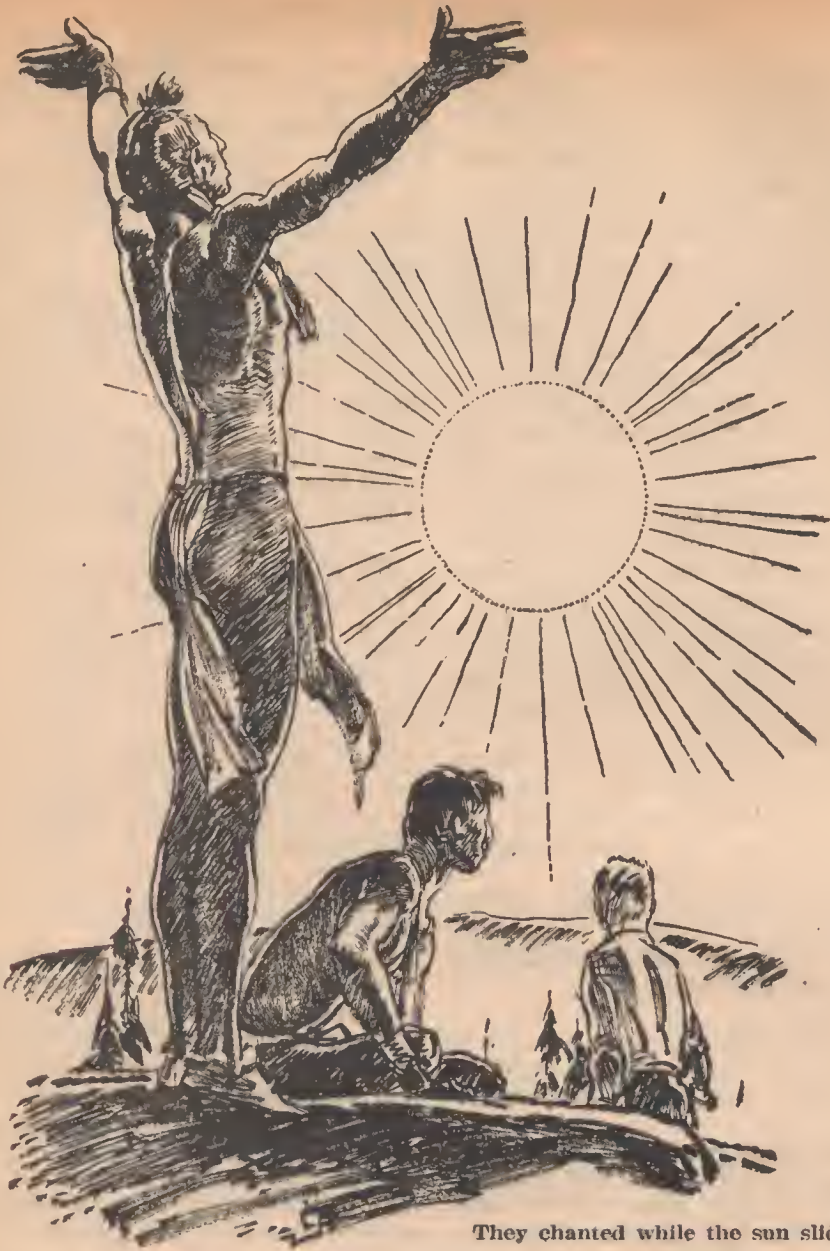
"We've got to drift out of here in a hurry. It's almost dark, and you can't travel that back-trail through the timber in the dark. Foller me, and dead quiet."

ME and Bird's Nest trailed after him, leading our ponies. I was sure now I weren't to be sent back, at least not right away. I was almighty glad I hadn't tried messing around with the truth, or anything else I didn't have no business to trifle with. Lester and Bird's Nest moved through the timber silent as shadders; and while I watched the horses, they pulled down the tepee and folded it and packed it on Lester's pony; but first they rolled his grub and jerked meat, and a iron kettle and small ax and our blankets inside the folded canvas.

Well, in about no time we was ready to leave. We didn't lead our horses along the game-trail in the bottom, but through the timber, where they left hardly any tracks on the soft pine-needles. And sometimes we mounted and rode in the shallow creek for a long ways, maybe crossing over and coming out the other side, or after sloshing along in the water for a spell, we come out on the same side; and always where a rocky ledge left no tracks.

We kept going the rest of the night and crossed another divide, and before it begun to get light in the east, Lester led the way down a mountain-side so steep the horses set down and slid on their tails, and we camped in thick timber a long way from the creek. Game-trails in them little cañons always foller along the creeks, and anybody scouting through there would be sure to pass along that trail. Lester warned me to keep off all game-trails, and never step in one and leave tracks, but always to walk on the dead pine-needles.

They figgered we was safe here for a while, and Lester drove the horses into a small park where the grass was good. He set down on guard while they grazed,



They chanted while the sun slid down.

ready to mount at any minute and haze 'em in if anything looked dangerous. Bird's Nest took the ax and cut lodge-poles for the tepee. We pitched it in the thickest timber we could find.

We was far enough away now to risk a small fire and cook something. Lester had brung salt and matches and a little sugar, and coffee and a iron kettle and a frying-pan, and a flour-sack of jerked meat. Bird's Nest threwed in together a few hunks of jerky, a couple of handfuls of coffee and a dab of sugar and stewed it for a while. After it cooled, we drunk the coffee-soup out of the kettle and et the jerky with our fingers. We didn't have no cups or regular eating tools. Fingers is good enough, except maybe for

somebody who is laid out sick and down with his head under him a-waiting to die, and has to have everything just so.

Bird's Nest took a red stone pipe and a plug of tobacco from the bottom of his otter-skin quiver and shaved off some tobacco with his skinning-knife, and filled the pipe and lit it with a burning stick from the fire. He handled that stick like it was loaded dynamite, and put it back on the fire when he got through with it, respectful as anything. When the pipe was going, he lifted it first toward the sky and held it there a spell. Then he touched the bowl, very gentle, to the ground. Next he held it straight out, slow and graceful, to the east, south, west and north, one after the other. He done

it ever so exact and careful before he took a puff himself, except a couple of little short ones to get it going. I never see anybody do that with a pipe before, and I asked him why he done it.

Bird's Nest looked at me sharp to see if I was in earnest. When he see I really didn't know what any respectable Injun has *got* to do before he smokes, he set out to explain it. First he asked if I knowed there was sperits up above and all around in the air. Well, everybody knows that much. And I says:

"Sure there is. And plenty of 'em."

Then he asked if I knowed there was another breed of sperits down under the earth.

I said I weren't sure, but it wouldn't surprise me if there was.

He said there was a-plenty under the earth, and most of 'em was monstrous ornery and mean—"bad-medicine—bronco-sperits," he called them, and he said you had to be careful of *them*, special. And he asked if I knowed there was a tribe of good-medicine sperits guarding the eastern Entrance-to-the-World; and other bands of friendly, reliable sperits watching the north, south, and west entrances, guarding them places night and day, year in and year out, and a-fighting constant to keep out the heap-bad-medicine bronco-sperits who was always a-clamoring and raring around and trying to bust in.

That sounded kind of fishy to me. But when I thought about it, I knowed it was surely as reasonable as some things they had told me about heaven. So I didn't say nothing agin it.

JUST then, I got up to go outside and started to walk *between* Bird's Nest and the fire, *while he was smoking*! He grabbed me, only just in time, and made me cross on the other side of the fire. Nobody but a hairbrain would walk between a man and the fire while that man is smoking! Such a high-handed thing is a rank insult to all the sperits, Bird's Nest said, almost as bad as cussing them out deliberate. And not a one of them will stand for it. If Bird's Nest hadn't been wide-awake and grabbed me and I had went ahead and done it, all of us who slept in the lodge would be goners. Brushing the bad luck out of the tepee with white-sage might of helped some, he said, and if we was lucky, maybe only one or two of us would of died. And if we had brushed it out extra-thundering careful, and if we was a whole lot luckier

than we deserved, maybe the sperits would of got soft-hearted and only made us lame for the rest of our lives.

Lester come up then with the horses, and we tied them in the timber near the tepee because it was daylight now. Lester sat down and et, and afterward took out his pipe and lit it with a coal, but he didn't offer a smoke to the sperits, in *any* direction—just started puffing away as careless and know-nothing as a white man. Bird's Nest didn't say nothing about it—he was too polite; but I could see that Lester acting so reckless made him powerful uneasy and worried. I reckon Lester thought he knowed more about such things than Bird's Nest because he was older and had went to that Injun-college. But Bird's Nest didn't think so, and neither did I when I see, later, what come of such dreadful carelessness.

CHAPTER VIII

IT weren't but a few days before Lester's wound was healed up. And by this time most of our jerked meat was gone. Lester weren't sure yet if it was safe to shoot with his rifle anywhere around there. I knowed, of course, that no sheriffs or marshals would be after us since Beavertooth's lies in town. But I didn't tell about Lester's funeral after what I had told at first.

When the jerky was gone, Bird's Nest took his bow and arrows and purified his medicine in the smoke of white-sage, and made sure it was all right with the sperits if we hunted that day. And Lester said I could go with Bird's Nest. It didn't take long before we see fresh tracks of a small elk herd in the timber. I couldn't tell there was any wind blowing, but Bird's Nest threwed some dead grass in the air and watched it settle. It showed a little draft from the east, so we worked east through the woods slow and quiet.

Bird's Nest said the elk would be laying down at this time of day, so there weren't no use follering the tracks; that elk, before they laid down, was sure to make a circle and come *down*-wind to lay in a thick patch of timber in the center of that circle. They did this so if a wolf, or anything, was on their trail, he would pass upwind of them before he got there. And even if they was sound asleep, their noses was always wide-awake and would rouse them in time.

Well, me and Bird's Nest went around that mountain as slow and careful as a

pair of gray wolves, and pretty soon Bird's Nest *smelled* elk. And in a minute I did too. It was a kind of cattle-smell, only different. You could tell it in a minute. We knowed then we was right close, and Bird's Nest made me stay behind. With his bow in his left hand and a arrow ready on the string, he crawled ahead on his belly. He come to a little rise and raised himself to look over. His quiver was on his back, and the feathered ends of a dozen more arrows was sticking up behind his shoulder. I see him pull that tough bow almost into a half-circle, slow and steady, and let go with the arrow. I heard a scrambling noise when the herd jumped to its feet. Bird's Nest's right hand come back over his shoulder like a streak, yanked another arrow from the quiver, slapped it across the bow, drewed it back and let her rip again and reached for another, and another. He got off four arrows in about four seconds. I never see a man do anything faster! Even Sam couldn't hardly work the lever of his rifle any faster!

Bird's Nest stood up, and I run forward. I could hear the elk crashing through the brush and breaking branches, but they was out of sight in the timber. Bird's Nest set down and took his pipe from the quiver, but there weren't no dead elk out there in front of him. He lit his red stone pipe and offered a smoke to all the sperits in turn before he pointed ahead and told me to look for arrows. I run out; and when he see I had two, he called me back.

"There ought to be four," I says. "I seen you shoot four times."

He grinned and said we would find the other two in a elk after we had give it time to lay down and stiffen up some. Well, we set there until he finished his smoke and put the pipe away.

WE took the trail of the wounded one. After a ways the tracks began to zig-zag, which showed the elk was looking for a place to lay down. Pretty soon we see a thick clump of brush, and Bird's Nest stopped and pointed. I see a brown, hairy back behind some down timber. Bird's Nest crept a little closer and let go with two more arrows, fast as lightning. The elk fell with a crash, and busted off two arrows sticking in the side it fell on.

Bird's Nest skinned it and spread the skin, hair side down, on the ground, and took out the livers and some other inside

works good to eat, and laid them on the hide. And he cut out the big and tough sinews that run along the back and saved them. He said they would make fine bowstrings. Then he cut the meat off the bones and told me to fetch Lester and the packhorse. We saved every scrap of meat, and the big wet hide. When you're on the dodge, you can't tell when you'll have another chance to kill meat.

In camp we cut most of the meat into thin strips and hung it on low branches to dry. In two or three days it would be dry enough to pack in bags we could make from the hide, and it would keep a year or even longer.

Next morning Bird's Nest took the pack pony and went back to where we killed the elk. He wanted the leg-bones for the soft white stuff in the inside. He said it was the best medicine-food you could eat, and if you et enough, your bones would become as strong as an elk's. He brung the head, too. But that weren't the best thing he brung. He had sneaked up quiet and careful to the carcass, and found a big eagle feeding, and was lucky enough to kill it. He said this was the plainest proof that the sperits was on our side now, and would help us in everything we done—that is, if Lester would reform and forget his reckless white-man habits and not bring bad luck a-swooping down.

BUT we didn't have to worry about Lester no more. Right off he begun to reform; kind of gradual at first, like he was ashamed to be decent. But he got more sensible every day. The first sign of it showed soon after Bird's Nest come back with the bones and the eagle. Lester fixed one of the tail-feathers on his hat so it hung down over the brim in a way that Bird's Nest said was approved by the sperits. And that very evening while Bird's Nest was up on a hill a-singing a song of praise and compliments to the setting sun, and Lester was busy scraping some thin chips off the hide to boil into glue, almost before he knowed it himself, Lester was a-chanting away too. He glanced at me sideways, but I never let on I heard. I was glad to see him donate a little praise to something that had saved his life.

Well, the very next day I was more cheered up than ever to see Lester there on that hilltop with Bird's Nest at sundown. They chanted, low and steady, while the old sun slid behind the mountains like he weren't in no hurry to leave

and go off to another sperit round-up. Lester weren't keeping time by bending and straightening his knees, like Bird's Nest always done. But I reckon that didn't make no difference to the sperits, because they didn't do nothing about it.

PRETTY soon Bird's Nest got busy and tanned the elk hide. It was a hard job, and he said it was work no man ought to do or would *think* of doing if he had a squaw or two loafing around his lodge. He pegged out the hide in the shade and worked for two hours scraping off every bit of flesh and fat. Then I see why he had brung back the elk's head. He took the ax and split the skull and let the brains run out on the hide. He had boiled up some soapweed roots and some tallow in the kettle, and mixed this with the brains and rubbed the mixture into the hide. Then he folded it and left it all night to soak in.

Next afternoon he went at it again and rubbed and worked the hide over a log, stretching and pulling it for hours. When it was dark, and the hide was about worked dry, he built a fire and put on some rotten wood to make it smoke, and hung the hide in the smoke and let it stay all night.

Before Bird's Nest tanned the hide, he cut off the tough neck part to make a medicine-shield. He said no man who expected to have much luck or hoped to amount to shucks could afford to be without a shield; because a medicine-shield, if you was careful when you made it and performed all the sacred things laid down by the sperits, was dead sure to turn arrows and bullets, no matter how fast they come at you. He said his grandfather had a shield that saved his life more than a hundred times.

Well, Bird's Nest dug a hole and heated some stones and rolled them in with a pole. He poured water on the hot stones, and Lester helped him stretch the neck-hide over it so the steam coming up would thicken it. It made the hide thicker and tougher and wrinkled up some, but Bird's Nest pounded out the wrinkles with another stone. Then he cut a string about a foot long from the hide, and held one end of it in the center and traced a circle with a burnt stick, and he cut out that circle of hide. From there on, he had to go even more slow and careful.

Bird's Nest got his shield finished in a few days, except the painting. Him and Lester talked all one night about what pictures was best. They decided to paint

on it a wolf's ears and the claws of a grizzly with a big picture of the Thunder-bird at the top. It wouldn't do to paint anything on the shield above the Thunder-bird; that would offend him, and you couldn't tell what might happen. The wolf's ears would bring the power to hear as good as a lobo-wolf. The bear's claws would give the strength of a grizzly, and the Thunder-bird at the top was sure to keep his eye on the shield's owner and see that he got plenty of help from the friendly sperits.

Bird's Nest hunted all over the mountains for three days to find the right stuff to make paint. He brought back some red earth and a few soft, greenish-colored stones which he pounded up. He mixed the juice of a couple of plants with the colored dirt, and it was pretty good paint too; and he had to sing just the right songs while he was painting the shield.

BIRD'S NEST was kind of changed by that shield. When he carried it slung over his shoulder, he held his head higher and his neck straighter, and never smiled. I asked Lester what was eating on him, and Lester said that all young men of his tribe got that way when their hearts was bad. In the old days, he said, a Injun could go on the warpath to ease himself when his heart was bad. And after he had butchered a few enemies, or stole a few horses, the bad feeling left him and he come back plumb cured. And he wouldn't be hit by it again until maybe along about next spring, when the grass come green and there was plenty of feed for the war-ponies. Then his heart might go bad on him again, and he'd have to prance out on the warpath once more to cure it. But you dasn't take the warpath now, he said. The pony-soldiers would come after you and give you a rough time, and spoil a pore Injun's fun.

Well, Bird's Nest's heart stayed bad for maybe a week. Then he cut himself a little slender reed and made holes in it; and one evening after he finished his song to the sun, he set down on the hill by himself and took out that reed and blew on it. It made a kind of sad, chirpy music, and when Lester heard it, he grinned and says:

"Gillie, Bird's Nest has gone and fell in love! No wonder his heart is bad. Some squaw back at the Reservation is eating-on-him!"

At first I was shocked and disappointed in Bird's Nest. I thought anybody who

knowned as much as he did ought to be above giving two hoops for any squaw. But pretty soon I remembered what a help a few squaws would be. So I told him about the young squaw who handled Sinful so good at the tepee where I had my breakfast the day I come to the Reservation:

"There's one," I says, "who aint no slouch when it comes to minding ponies."

He said he had knowed that squaw for a long time, and last year, in the spring, when his heart got bad on him, he decided to make a dicker with her old man. But just before he went to do it, her old man give a dog-feast. Bird's Nest said that feast was a terrible disappointment. There was plenty of things wrong. The dogs weren't fat, and some was a little too old to make good eating; dogs eat the best, he said, just two weeks after they're weaned. And these dogs was burnt some, and the hairs weren't picked out of the soup careful enough to suit some people. So her cooking kind of cooled him off. And anyway, soon after the feast, another buck offered the old man six pretty fair ponies in trade for her, and the old miser wouldn't even listen but throwed that Injun out, plumb through the side of the tepee. There was several more signs and signal-smokes, he said, that pointed to bad luck if you monkeyed around her, so he had kind of let the idea slide.

I hoped Bird's Nest would go back and bring out a few other squaws that knowed their business, and I told Lester so. But he said:

"You need too many ponies to trade for squaws. In the old days you could jump out and steal ponies, but now they wouldn't let you. Just steal a few ponies these days, and see what happens to you! The first thing you know, you'll be too dead to skin. No, Gillie, times has changed, and things is mighty tough for Injuns. Things is pretty much run-down and ruined anyway, and there aint much use trying to figger a way to enjoy life no more. A person might as well forget it."

BUT Bird's Nest didn't forget it. He took his bow and arrows and his new medicine-shield and laid out in the willers near a beaver-dam for four nights. He shot three beavers, but they dove in the water too quick, and he lost his arrows. But the fourth evening he took extra special care a-purifying his bow and the arrows too. He smoked them up good with white-sage and rubbed his

medicine-pouch back and forth along every arrow in the quiver. This time he shot a beaver, and the arrow went through it and pinned it to a tree. Before the beaver could break the arrow and dive into the water, Bird's Nest swarmed in and knocked it on the head with a club.

Well, he cut out a castor from that beaver, and saved it and carried it in a little pouch of skin he made for it. He said if he rubbed that beaver-castor on the piece of broken mirror in his medicine-bag, and then shined it in the eyes of any squaw, that squaw was *bound* to foller him anywhere; she just couldn't help it. Even if she hated him before, she was dead sure to like him so thundering much after he shined her, that she couldn't hardly stand it, and would give up everything and foller him everywhere, like a tame bear.

It was pretty plain now why Bignose George's red-headed hasher had run off with the sheep-man. I asked Bird's Nest, to make sure, and he said of course any squaw, white or red, would simply *have* to foller even a sheep-man if he shined her. She couldn't help it, and couldn't be *expected* to help it; and why, did I reckon, the sperits had put castors in beavers, anyway?

CHAPTER IX

ONE day Lester rode out to make a wide circle and look for horse-tracks. While he was gone, Bird's Nest was busy in the tepee making arrows of red-willer shafts, binding on the feathers with elk sinew and glue made from boiled-up bones and pieces of hide. It's not as easy as you might think to make an arrow. For one thing, you've got to be uncommon careful and keep it pointing right at the fire as much as you can. And if you should break an arrow while you're making it, one of your own bones is sure to be broken too, to make up for it; and you won't have to wait long, either. But above all, you dasn't get careless and let that unfinished arrow point toward any friend of yourn. After the arrow is finished, the sperits don't give a hang where you point it. Bird's Nest wouldn't let me stay in the tepee while he made arrows. He said I moved around so much and so quick, that before he knowed it, he might let an arrow point my way; and then some day I would be killed by an arrow, or something worse.

When I knowed that, you bet I didn't *want* to stay in the lodge while he was shaping his arrows. So I was loafing around outside, a-wondering how everybody at the U Cross was making it without me. I was kind of homesick, I reckon, and I was missing Beavertooth's lies awful bad, and a-wondering if maybe I hadn't ought to go back to the U Cross, for a day or two, just to let 'em know I was alive and weren't killed off or nothing.

I was thinking about that so hard I weren't watching things very careful, and when I looked up, I see a man on a buckskin horse come riding out of the timber. It didn't take me long to run and dive under the tepee. I was in such a hurry I forgot the arrows Bird's Nest was a-making, and of course I had to bust in just when one was pointing square at that place in the lodge! Even then I didn't see what I had done. But Bird's Nest dropped the arrow and jumped up and made a grab for the white-sage we kept handy. But before he got it I hissed:

"Somebody on a buckskin horse!"

There weren't no time to brush me off with white-sage nor nothing. And just then one of our horses let out a loud whinny. Bird's Nest jumped for his bow and quiver and yanked his new shield off its tripod and slung it over his shoulder. He shook the arrows loose in the quiver so they would come out quick, snatched his medicine-bag from where it hung, and shoved it into his open shirt-front, grabbed his long knife from the ground where he had been working on the arrows, and rammed it back into the leather scabbard on his hip, all ready for war in about two shakes. His little quick black eyes was a-burning like two hot coals fanned by a high wind. He stepped through the round door-hole, and I foltered him out.

THE man on the buckskin horse rode up at a slow walk. He located our horses easy enough after that whinny, and now he seen us and the tepee. He reached down, slow, like he was fingering his cinch, but he was loosening the rifle in the scabbard under his left knee. The stranger pulled up and stopped about twenty yards away, and I see a six-shooter on his hip. He didn't seem to be a-watching us extra close at first; but when Bird's Nest moved a hand to straighten the quiver on his back, the stranger tensed up sudden, and I knowed



he could of had that six-shooter covering us so quick it would make your head swim! But he seen that Bird's Nest never touched an arrow. So he says:

"Howdy."

Bird's Nest acted like he didn't know that much white-man talk. I says:

"Howdy."

So he spoke to me. But now he was a-watching Bird's Nest;

"Your Injun friend don't seem any too glad to see a stranger. Tell him if he's been a-butcherin a few slow-elk, it aint no business of mine." I knowed what he meant by a slow-elk, all right. He meant if we had been killing somebody's *beef*, he didn't give a hoop. He looked like he'd stolen a-plenty himself.

He made me hot:

"We aint butchered nobody's beef. We're collecting red-willow shafts to make arrows. We trade 'em to the Injuns on the Reservation."

He grinned like he knowed everything.

"Well, well, has things got so bad in this country that a Injun and a white kid out after arrow-shafts and not both'ring nobody has got to hide their tepee in the thickest timber they can find, and keep their horses tied up where you couldn't find 'em with a search-warrant and a lantern? And be so dead crafty that a man never sees a single hoss-track in the game-trail a-winding through this cañon? If things is that bad, I reckon I've drifted to a plumb good country—for my business." And he rubbed his chin with his hand kind of thoughtful. But all the time he weren't forgetting to watch Bird's Nest. I says:

"Well, arrows is what we're here for, and some of 'em is laying half-made in the tepee right now, if you don't believe it."

He grinned again like he knowed everything, and I see that his mouth was wide and thin like it had been slit in his face with a sharp knife. He shoved his black hat on the back of his head, and set side-ways in the saddle:

"Bless your little heart, sonny. Let old Tom Hands give you a piece of advice: when you've been a-sucking eggs and you've done hid the shells, don't up and blurt out that you *aint* been sucking eggs and can prove it because there aint no shells laying around."

I DIDN'T know what he meant by that. But I didn't like him. I didn't like nothing about him. I didn't even like his buckskin horse. The ends of its ears was cropped off short, which showed it had been a outlaw at some time. I wouldn't of trusted that horse, and I didn't trust its rider. I was about to ask what sucking eggs had to do with everything anyway, when he says:

"Well, you might ask a tired traveler to get down and rest his hands and feet."

Bird's Nest come out of it then and says:

"How! You get down. We eat."

The man looked surprised and says:

"Ho! So you *do* savvy a word or two." And he got off and tied his horse to a tree. But when he done it, he took his rifle from the scabbard, worked the lever and throwed out the catridges and put 'em in his pocket and slid the empty gun back in the scabbard. I see he weren't taking chances on us grabbing that gun while he et. The handle of the six-shooter on his right hip was pretty worn; the wood was almost black, and looked like it had been used regular for a long time. When Bird's Nest held open the door-flap, Tom Hands waved us both ahead and came in last. He went to the far side of the tepee and set down with his back agin a lodge-pole and his face to the door. I see he weren't in the habit of letting nobody get behind him if he knowed it! I reckon anybody in a strange country has got to be careful, but he was the awfulest careful man I ever seen. I bet there was plenty of folks a-looking for him where he come from. You knowed, somehow, he was bad-medicine the minute you seen that wide mouth with its thin, straight lips and that slow half-grin topped off by them steely eyes.

I was dead scared that Lester would come back any minute. Even if the funeral plans had worked fine, it wouldn't do for this man to get a good look at Lester and maybe tell around the country that he had saw a Injun of that description. Bird's Nest built up the fire and throwed a handful of jerky in the kettle, and was about to put in some coffee and sugar. But the stranger stopped him and said jerky was enough, and not to ruin it with any greasy Injun mixture. I thought I had better slide outside and just ease away into the timber and climb a hill and watch for Lester, to warn him to stay away till the man left. When I got up to go out, he says:

"Set down where you're at, boy. I want to ask you a few things." He said everything like he meant it. You felt you dasn't go agin what he said. So I set down again.

"Now"—and he looked at me pretty sharp—"tell me about this sheep-and-cattle war that's busted loose around these parts."

"She aint broke out yet, that I've heard. We've been here in the mountains a long time."

"Well, she's busted wide open, good and plenty! Three men has cashed in already, I hear. Now I want to know something about the line-up. Is the cow-men strongest in this country, or is the sheep-men on top? I don't aim to get on no losing side."

THEN I knowed he was a profeshnal killer, what old Stan called a "lone-wolf killer," ready for a few dirty dollars to butcher folks that never lifted a hand agin him. I might have knowed that much from his looks!

"Come on, sonny," he says, while I was thinking what a ornery lowdown spec'-man he was, "answer up like a little man. Which side has got the edge?"

I hated him worse than ever when he called me "little man." And I wished, for a second, the old man's blood would take to rampaging around in me and make me start on this Hands. But when I looked again at that wide slit of a mouth, and them cold steely eyes, I thought maybe I better forget about the old man's blood and answer up pretty quick. So I says:

"The cow-men is strongest, but the sheep-men aint no slouches, neither."

He says, kind of absent-like to himself: "Maybe I aint come all this way for nothing, then."

THE TRUTH ABOUT GILEAD SKAGGS

Bird's Nest started to go after some more wood, but when he got to the door-flap, the stranger ripped out a cussword that made me jump:

"Set down! I don't let no Injuns out o' my sight! I'll get that wood myself, and I'll take your bow with me. Hand it over. I've saw two fellers in my time with feathers a-sprouting from their backs. I'll take that knife too."

Bird's Nest had his new medicine-shield slung over his shoulder, and I was afraid he'd figger this was the chance he had been looking and hungering for to give it a try and see how strong its medicine was. I looked for him to whip out an arrow. And I had a feeling the medicine of that shield weren't worth shucks agin this tough stranger and the medicine in his heavy six-shooter. I was glad to see Bird's Nest set down and hand over his bow and knife. Tom Hands took 'em with his left hand and went out and got a jag of wood, which he carried in his left arm, leaving his right hand free. He throwed down the bow and knife outside.

AS I said before, he was the awfulest careful man I ever see. But when he come back with the wood, he made one mistake that fixed things so it didn't make no difference how careful he was after that; he had done it then and he was *bound* to get the worst of it! He turned to the *left* when he come back in the lodge! Bird's Nest's eyes gleamed when he seen him do it. *He* knowed it was only a question of time, then.

Well, Hands settled himself again with his back agin a lodge-pole and says:

"Which are the biggest cow-outfits in this country? And where are they located?" I was starting to answer and tell him the truth, too, when I see the lower edge of the tepee begin a-lifting, ever so slow, a half-inch at a time, over to the left of him. It was the spookiest thing I ever seen happen! I just set there and stared. Bird's Nest seen it too, but he knowed what it was and started talking fast. I see the tip end of a gun-muzzle a-raising that canvas! I was sure now it was the muzzle of Lester's thirty-thirty, but I couldn't drag my eyes away. Bird's Nest fired questions so fast that he made the stranger keep his head turned away from that gun-muzzle. But you can bet he would of saw it anyway; if he hadn't turned to the left when he come in the lodge and so set all the influences agin him.

"Shut up!" he says to Bird's Nest, and he gave him the worst cussing ever I heard up to that time.

But Bird's Nest kept on jabbering while the edge of that canvas crept up, inch by inch, so slow it hardly seemed to move. The stranger was getting terrible mad when Bird's Nest didn't shut up, and I thought something would happen any minute. I just *had* to watch that canvas moving up, slow and steady, and I was afraid the light it let in would draw Tom Hands' eyes. But just then—up she come with a quick jerk, and there was Lester inside the tepee; his thirty-thirty not three feet from Tom Hands' left side!

Lester says, awful quiet:

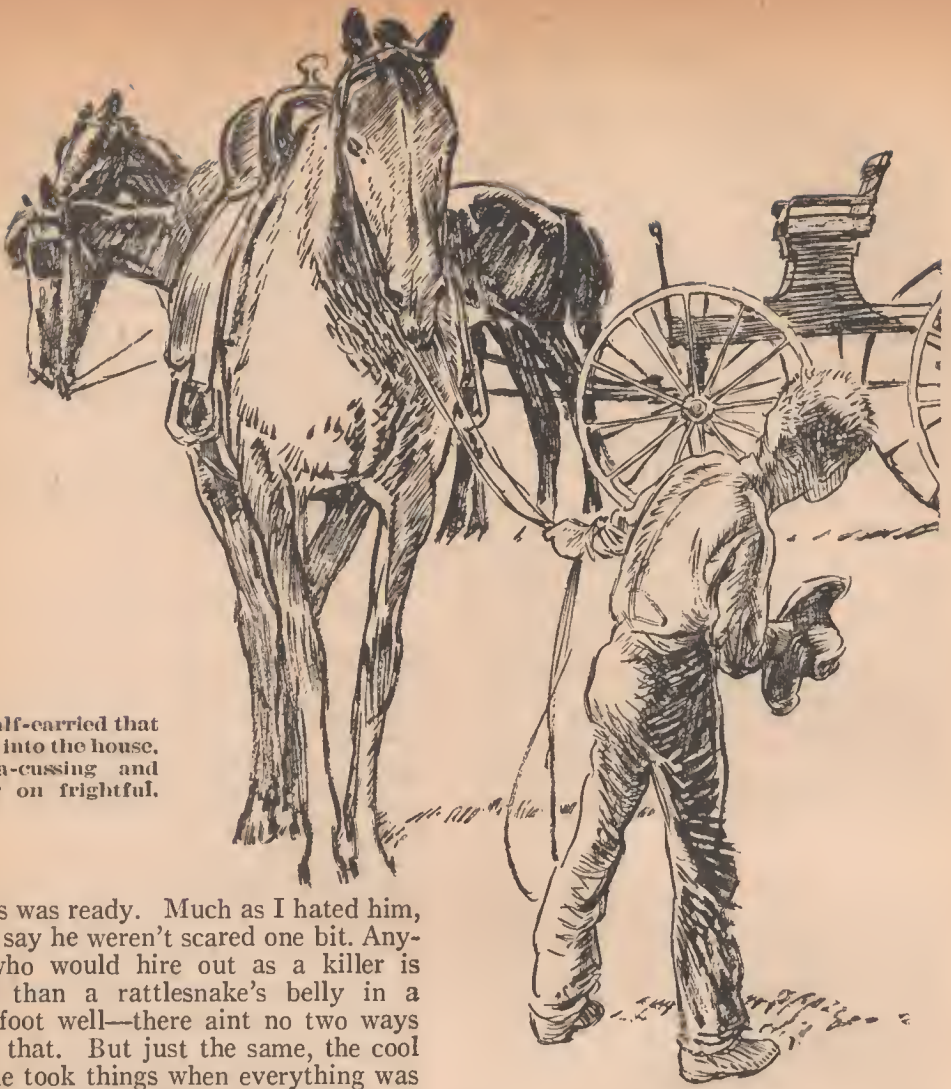
"Any wrong move is your last!"

THE tough stranger's hands went up. He couldn't do nothing else with that rifle almost agin him. Lester said something in Injun, and Bird's Nest stepped over and took the six-shooter and passed it to Lester. Lester shoved it in the waistband of his pants.

Bird's Nest ducked out after his bow and knife. He come back in with a bound, and I hardly knowed him! His face was twisted; his eyes seemed smaller, and they blazed like hot fire. He was like a animal, some terrible, dangerous animal! I never see anybody as mad as Bird's Nest was. I reckon a Injun can get a heap madder than any white man. As sure as I was that Bird's Nest wouldn't harm me, I was plumb, shivery scared of him now!

He snaked an arrow out of that quiver so fast you couldn't hardly see his hand go back for it. And he would of drove it clean through that Tom Hands if Lester hadn't made a jump and jerked the bow from his hand. Bird's Nest yanked out his knife, but Lester grabbed his wrist. Lester was older and stronger. The knife dropped to the ground and Lester put a foot on it. It was all Lester could do to hold Bird's Nest and shove him back. I thought Tom Hands was a goner, but Lester said something in Injun so stern that Bird's Nest slowed up and stood glaring and panting like something was a-burning him up.

Tom Hands hadn't moved from where he set on the ground, except to let his hands down and to get his legs under him ready for a quick jump. And I see now he had pulled a clasp-knife and was fingering the blade. If Bird's Nest had got past Lester and come at him, that Tom



She half-carried that big ox into the house, him a-cussing and taking on frightful.

Hands was ready. Much as I hated him, I *will* say he weren't scared one bit. Any one who would hire out as a killer is lower than a rattlesnake's belly in a forty-foot well—there aint no two ways about that. But just the same, the cool way he took things when everything was agin him *made* you have a kind of respect for him.

Now that we had his six-shooter, he could see, from the plain murder in Bird's Nest's face, and from Lester's stern looks too, that he was in a hopeless bad jackpot. But he didn't let on that he even knowed it. Bird's Nest jabbered a string of hot Injun words a-begging Lester, I reckon, to butcher this Hands so he couldn't tell he'd saw us and send out a posse. But Lester clamped down on Bird's Nest and made him shut up. If Lester hadn't learned white man's ways, I bet he would of let Bird's Nest finish him with an arrow, or done it himself with the rifle. And it would of been a heap sight better for everybody, later, if he had.

Lester took the catridges from the six-shooter and dropped 'em in his pocket, and told Hands to unbuckle his belt, which was full of catridges, and hand it over. Lester took every catridge from the belt and went through Hands' pockets and took the rifle catridges. Then he

give him back the empty six-shooter and belt. Hands says, slow and drawly and calm as could be:

"What's all the ruckus about, anyhow? You seem to be all-fired touchy just because I wouldn't take no sass from a couple of shirt-tail kids. You must be afeared of the law for some reason. Well, I aint too solid with the law, myself. I aint likely to set nobody after you."

Lester looks him over and says:

"Never mind about us and the Law. Eat what you want and get a-going." And he set the kettle of jerky in front of Hands.

After Hands et a few bites he says:

"Well, you aint been butchering nobody's beef, after all. This is elk, and no mistake. What you *have* been up to aint no bark off my shins. I was asking these boys something about the line-up in the sheep-and-cattle war."

"Don't know nothing about it," Lester says. "Eat your vittles and get a-going."

Tom Hands didn't say nothing more.



Lester went out with him when he mounted, looked through his rifle and the slicker tied on his saddle and made sure he didn't have no more catridges. And we watched him start with his empty rifle and six-shooter. He turned in the saddle a short ways off, and his wide mouth had a half-grin, like he didn't mean it:

"Much obliged for the feed." The grin died away, and he looked hard as tombstones.

"I'll be askin' you for them catridges next time we meet."

All three of us understood all right that if ever we seen him again, hell would be a-popping! His horse climbed slow and steady out of the cañon, and we watched until he crossed a ridge bare of timber and rode out of sight.

I turned to Bird's Nest, and asked why he didn't grab an arrow and let drive with it when Tom Hands told him to fork over his bow and knife, before Lester come back. "You was wearing your new shield," I says, "and it was just the chance you have been a-looking for to

test out its medicine. Maybe you won't get such a good chance agin for a mighty long time."

Bird's Nest said you bet he would of tried it, but the signs was all wrong to-day. He had saw a cloud yesterday afternoon traveling opposite to the wind, and he had noticed for years that whenever he seen such a thing, influences was at work agin him and the sperits wouldn't be on his side or give him the least help for two or three days afterward. He would of took a chance anyway, he said, if he hadn't saw in a dream last night, a black eagle make a swoop for a mountain-sheep lamb, and just before the eagle nabbed it, a rock fell off a cliff and hit the eagle and killed it in midair. He knowed as soon as he woke up that this was one of the strongest warnings he ever had in a dream; but he couldn't figger-out what it meant till Tom Hands come along. Then he knowed right away that the lamb stood for Hands, the black eagle was himself and the rock was the bad-medicine sperits a-laying for him on account of that cloud traveling the wrong way. Bird's Nest said that nobody with brains enough to grease the tip end of a wildcat's whisker would take chances

after the sperits had gone to so much trouble to warn him.

We pulled down the tepee, packed up and set out, deeper into the mountains. It wouldn't do to stay here with that Hands knowing where we was. Well, we traveled south and kept on a-traveling, day after day, until we got plumb out of danger from any posse he might send after us.

CHAPTER X

WE made a new camp and stayed a few weeks. It was safe to use the rifle now, so we had plenty of meat and collected a sizable stack of elk and deer hides. And Bird's Nest trapped some small fur-animals with my traps, and shot two more beavers with his arrows. But Lester's catridges was almost gone now, and the ones he had took from Tom Hands was too big for the thirty-thirty. We had enough hides and fur to trade for catridges and maybe sell for money too, so we could buy more coffee and sugar and flour and things. So Lester and Bird's Nest talked it over and decided to shove along till we found a town; then we could set up the tepee where nobody wouldn't be likely to run across our camp, and one of us could ride to town with the pelts and sell 'em or trade 'em at a store.

It wouldn't be safe for Lester to be seen, and Bird's Nest weren't city-broke or used to towns and white-man ways. Lester was afraid to send *him*, afraid he wouldn't know how to act and would get himself tangled-up in some trouble. And Bird's Nest didn't want to mess around with towns, no way; so they decided it was best for me to go. Well, we traveled a good many more days before we come out on a high ridge and see a wide, settled valley a long way below. You could see haystacks and irrigating ditches and green trees growing in straight rows, and yellor patches where they had cut grain. In the middle of that valley was a town. It was plenty big enough to do our trading in, so we made camp in a deep cañon.

Then Lester told me to be crafty and careful in town, and not to talk to nobody more than I could help, and not to answer questions unless I had to. And if anybody asked me where I lived, to say I lived with my folks on a little homestead back in the foothills. I was ready to bet there weren't nobody in that town could bail me for anything if I didn't want to

tell it. If somebody got to prying into my business, I would give him a yarn so fuzzy it would make old Beavertooth himself stand goggle-eyed if he ever heard it!

The third morning after we made this camp, Lester saddled up Sinful and tied a few pelts behind my saddle. Bird's Nest had tanned 'em soft, and they weren't too clumsy or heavy to carry. I got an early start, and expected to be back before sundown that same day. But as I said, I had forgot that the sperits had it in for me about the arrow that time when Tom Hands come to our camp.

Well, I didn't pass nobody till I come almost to town. Then a fat man in a rickety buggy come from the other direction. His fuzzy-legged team dawdled along almost asleep, and he was lolling on the seat, bogged down in his own fat, a-singing away to himself—if you could call it singing: His voice would start low and tame enough, and then kind of get away from him and climb faster and faster, until it was climbing the scale like a rat up a rafter. I reckon he weren't gifted much when it come to music.

His store-bought clothes was muddy, like maybe he'd slept in 'em for a week or two, and his bald head gleamed like a mirror in the sun. He couldn't be bothered with a hat. The team stopped when me and Sinful come along, and the fat man looked up and seen us and quit mascreeing them helpless notes. He set back on the reins with a yank, like his team was the wildest and sniffiest broncos in seven States, and he hollered, "Whoa!" a couple of times, long after the horses was standing still and half asleep. When I got closer, I see he was sort of motheaten too, and frayed around the edges, and his yellowish blubbery face was scuffed-up some and nicked in places; it looked like it might of been chopped out of a Chinaman with a dull ax. At first I thought he was only a *little* drunk because he could talk straight. He blinked at me and says:

"Goin' to the Fair and Bean-Festival, boy?"

THAT was the awfulest best news I had heard in a long time! A fair was going on in town. I had never yet saw a fair, but you bet I had heard about fairs a-plenty. George and Beavertooth had both told me about any number of fairs they had saw. And George said one time: "Gillie, don't never miss a fair!

I've saw a world of fairs in my day, but I wouldn't miss another if I knowed for sure I was to be took out the next day and tied down and nibbled to death by young ducks. No sir! Never pass up no fairs!" Well, I would see this one from one end to the other, up one side and down the middle. I says to the drunk fat man:

"Sure, I'm a-going to the fair. Is she any good?"

"Good?" He set up straighter, and talked and gassed for a long time and told about all the wonderful things at the fair. It took so long that he got droopy and was about to fall asleep on the seat, but he snaked out a bottle from under the cushion and tilted her up and took a big snort and that roused him. He started again at the beginning and told everything a second time. And finally he got around to a side-show in a tent, a flea-circus, he called it, and it sounded like the wonderfulest thing of all. Then he took another pull at the bottle and cussed out the team, moderate, for a while. He forgot about the team and the flea-circus pretty soon, and went to telling how his wife had got mad at him and tried to bully him all over the grounds at the fair yesterday, and claimed he was drunk and said she wouldn't hang around no longer with a drunk man, even if it was her own wedded husband, and he laughed at by everybody. And she had been so ornery and unreasonable, she had up and quit him and went home with the neighbors.

"Yes, boy," he says, sorrowful as could be, "she quit me and went home with the neighbors." And tears run down off his nose, which was swole up and red, and I felt pretty sorry for him.

HE got kind of droopy again. But he got the bottle and held it to the sun and seen it was about half empty. He looked at me suspicious and owlish, like he thought maybe I had sneaked over and drunk some while he was talking. But in a minute he tilted her again and gurgled himself a longer one than before. That prodded him up, and he started all over and told once more about the flea-circus, and finally he got all the way around the circle again to his wife. He was getting mad now.

"The only way to handle a woman," he said, "is to knock her ears down the first time she opens her yawp to let out a cheep. And if Hank Hoppole, which is me, don't know how to handle women, then nobody never did know!"

I thought maybe he was a mite too hard on women. But it was something I didn't know nothing about; maybe he was right. Anyway, I didn't argue with him. Well, he tilted the bottle once more and almost finished it this time. Then he took on fiercer than ever about his wife, Mrs. Hoppole:

"If she so much as opens her yawp when I get home, I'll lam the stuffing out of her with this here buggy whip!" And he slashed it a cut through the air which made Sinful jump, but the sleepy team never moved. I reckon they was used to it. But Hank Hoppole yelled, "Whoa!" several times, like they was the awfulest raw broncos. And he cussed 'em out, pretty sultry, this time. He scrunched down in the seat and squinted at me like he was looking under a fence and couldn't see me plain. He held up a finger as solemn as a owl and whispered like there was somebody a-trying to horn in and listen:

"Looky here, boy! . . . If you want to see justice a-dealt out to a ungrateful wildcat of a woman, just you come along with me!" And he wished that buggy-whip through the air, *whim! wham! slash!* He looked almighty brave, but kind of crumbly at the same time.

"No," I says, "I'm a-going on to the fair."

SO then he pulled out a dollar and held it up:

"See there, boy? You come along and watch me. You'll learn something, and you'll get the dollar."

I could use that dollar at the fair, and I felt sorry for any man who was abused by his wife, and maybe I could learn something useful, so I said I'd go along and watch it.

Well, I follered behind the buggy, and after about a mile the team turned in at a farmhouse.

I didn't want to miss nothing, so I was close behind; and when he drove up to the kitchen door, Mrs. Hoppole opened it and come down the steps. Hank set back on the reins and bellered, "Whoa!" But the team had already stopped. Then he let out another beller, like a bull does when he's fighting-mad and paws dirt over his back with his front feet:

"Come out from there, Mirandy Hoppole, if you dare!" He didn't see her already coming, and stood up in the buggy and lammed around and around his head with the whip, cussing now to beat anything he done before.

She was peaked and kind of runty and sick-looking, and she walked over to the buggy as if she didn't hear a word of all his cussing and weren't one bit scared of him. He went on a-bellering like a hamstrung ox, and when she got to the side of the buggy, she says, as quiet as if she was saying, "Please pass the salt."

"Give Mirandy the whip, Hank. You're home now, and you can rest and sleep. I'll unhitch the team after I get you to bed." I'm a Chinaman if she didn't take the buggy-whip from his hand as easy as nothing, and smiled, tired-like, and put it back in the whip-socket. Hank Hopple blinked like he couldn't see her good on account of fog or something, and went on a-cussing everything and everybody. But she eased him down from the rig and drew one of his big, fat arms around her skinny shoulder. Little and weak-looking as she was, she half carried that big drunk ox into the house, him a-cussing and taking on frightful all the way, and *sounding* dangerous as a grizzly but minding her like the awfulest baby. Well, she got him inside, and when the door slammed after 'em, I was so disappointed in Hank Hopple and the wildcat-woman I just turned and rode away.

IN the main part of town horses hitched to wagons with straw in the bottom and maybe a couple of boards across the wagon-boxes for seats, was standing tied in rows to pole hitching-racks. There was always a flock of women and children a-setting in them wagons waiting for the menfolks to get through trading in the stores and to finish their business in the saloons. The board sidewalks was pretty much jammed with folks a-milling around and standing on the corners, some telling jokes and some as solemn and important-looking as could be.

I took my hides into a store, and the man behind the counter called the boss from the back, and they asked me what I wanted to do with them.

"Paw says to trade 'em for thirty-three catridges and coffee and flour and salt and sowbelly. Paw got his foot stepped on by one of our horses and is laid up."

"Where do you live, boy?"

"We took up a homestead back in the foothills a few weeks ago and got the well dug all right, and now we're a-fencing, and we run out of grub. Paw traded for these hides off'n a bunch of Injuns we passed, and I've got to hurry and see the fair and get back before dark."



"Shun the sin-soaked tabernacles
of the money-changers."

"What did your old man give for these hides, boy?"

I knowed why he asked that! He was a-figgering if we got 'em for almost nothing, he wouldn't have to offer much for 'em, so I says:

"The Injuns didn't want to let these hides go, and Paw talked and talked, and finally got 'em to take a horse, old Buck, and our milk-cow, Splayfoot, and our dog Dolly, who just had fourteen pups in the trail-wagon. When the Injuns seen the pups, they said they would trade. Paw couldn't beat 'em down no lower."

"What! Your paw give a horse and a milk-cow and a dog and fourteen pups for three summer-killed beaver-skins and two half-tanned deer hides and a half a dozen mushrat skins! Such expensive hides is too rich for my blood." And he

started to roll up the hides. I see I had made them hides sound *too* valuable. So I says:

"Well, you see, old Buck was sixteen year old and his teeth was wore down so bad from sandy grass when we crossed the desert that he couldn't eat, and Paw said he would die off in a few days anyway; and Splayfoot had gone lame and couldn't travel no further, and she was dry and too old to have another calf; and she had the lumpy-jaw and was a-laying bogged in a mudhole when the Injuns come along, and we had tried to tail her

"No," I says, "I don't, Mister. They was only cur dogs and weren't worth much. But the pups was awful cute, and Dolly was mighty smart."

He snickered and looked at the other man:

"By this time, boy, them Injuns has probably took out your awful cute pups, one by one, and a couple of fat squaws has strangled 'em and boiled 'em up into dog-soup; that's what's happened to your awful cute pups!"

"Oh—*no*—sir!" I says, like I couldn't believe such a thing.



up for three hours and forty minutes. Paw would of shot her long ago, but we didn't have no catridges left. So you see we didn't pay so awful much for them hides when you understand it all."

"That puts a different light on it," the boss says. Then the other man said:

"Boy, do you happen to know why the Injuns was so glad to trade when they seen your dog and the fourteen pups?"

I tried to look like I was about to bawl, and the boss felt pretty sorry about the pups himself.

"I feel sorry for you, boy," he says, shaking his head, "with a old man dumb as that. And I'll give you a sight more for them hides than I'd give your paw—and you can tell him so with my compliments." And he tied up a big hunk of bacon instead of sow-belly or boar-bos-

om, and two boxes of thirty-thirty catridges and plenty of salt and flour and coffee. He pulled out a dollar and give it to me:

"Take this, boy, and go see the fair."

So I rode Sinful to a livery barn where a man said he would feed and water him for fifty cents, and I could leave my groceries while I seen the fair. Then I hit off down the street on a run for the fair grounds.

BEAVERTOOTH and George were sure right about fairs! I wouldn't miss another, not if they took me out afterward and drowned me. I seen everything there was that day. But when night come, the Fair and Bean-Festival was all lit up with lanterns and kerosene flares and everything looked spooky. More people than ever come in after dark, and crowds was a-milling around.

I weren't missing nothing, and after a while I see a tent off by itself—a tent that was closed in the afternoon. It was open now, and jam-packed full of people, farmers and hay-ranchers and bean-growers and their wives, a few setting on wooden benches, but everybody dressed in their Sunday clothes and solemn as owls. I see this weren't no show to make you laugh, not by a long shot! There weren't no pictures on the canvas sign in front, only three words in letters as tall as me:

"**REPENT! REPENT! REPENT!**" And it said, "*Free,*" in small letters.

When I see it didn't cost nothing, I wedged myself in and ducked under people's arms and got almost to the middle of the crowd. At the back end of the tent somebody was talking in a deep, thundering voice like I never heard before. I couldn't get a look at whoever it was, because too many people was jammed in front. He could make his voice shiver and rumble and sound scarier than thunder rumbling away off when you're alone in the woods. When you heard that deep voice you knowed, somehow, that no matter what you had been doing lately, you didn't have no business to do it and you had better quit it and watch out! I shoved closer and heard:

"*Prepare! Prepare! Prepare!* For the Night is coming!"

The voice quit for a minute to let these words sink into you. The crowd was dead silent, and things was awful

spooky in there with the dim flares a-burning. I could feel a sperit or two hovering around, like I did in the tepee when Bird's Nest was chanting and asking the sperits to cure up Lester's wound. The voice boomed out, slow and solemn:

"The slaving jaws of the fire-eyed Beast gap wide—and the Night is coming!" I wanted to hear more about that, so I worked my way closer to the platform, but people was packed in so tight I couldn't see who was doing the talking even when I got pretty close. But you bet I could *hear* him plain enough! He made that old tent ring. And about every minute you could hear his fist come down on a table or something with a *bang!*

"I say unto you—shun the sin-soaked tabernacles of the money-changers, the unbelievers, where all is vanity and vex-ashun of sperit! Repent! Repent! It is written—your sins shall be washed away and shaken from you even as the gentle hind shaketh the morning dew from its quivering flanks!"

I see now he was a-lamming it to the same old Devil they'd told us about at the brick Home. I had heard three or four preachers go for the Devil when I was little and hived away at the Home. But they weren't in it with *this* one. He laid it over them forty ways! Although I couldn't see him yet for the crowd, I could hear him a-stomping around on that platform and banging a table or something and bellering to beat four of a kind. I'll bet there weren't nobody, anywhere, would stand a show to argue with *him!*

WELL, he kept on calling for everybody to come forward. And pretty soon a few people begun pushing forward, and some was moaning and a lot more was crying, soft and comfortable, and the preacher warmed up and the way he cut loose on the devil was enough to curl your hair. Some people near me was terrible excited and kept calling out, "Hallelujah!" and swetting like old Custer the time he beat Steeldust. I was jammed in there so tight I couldn't hardly move. Everybody begun shoving, and in about two shakes I was drug and pushed and shoved up in front, right below the platform. Well, I looked up to see the preacher. And when I seen him, my lights and livers come pretty near exploding out of me. That preacher was the *old man!* *My old man!* *My father!*

Our hero continues his journey—and finds life even more exciting in the next installment.

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—OVER 50,000 WORDS

BLADE of the BUCCANEERS

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY



Decorations by PERCY LEASON

A STIRRING TALE OF POWDER-SMOKE
AND HOOF-BEAT AND CLASHING STEEL;
OF BLOOD AND STORM AND TREASURE; OF
THE WRONG MAN KILLED IN ENGLAND;
OF A DESPERATE CRUISE WITH SIR
FRANCIS DRAKE TO SPOIL THE SPANISH
MAIN; OF A PLOT TO MURDER THE QUEEN;
OF DANGER, DESPAIR AND—TRIUMPH!

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



Drawn by Jeremy Cannon

Talbot knew that despite the heaving deck, the wet boards, the uncertain light, despite his wounded arm, he would kill Tom Gillard very soon. "The next will be for me," Talbot laughed.

BLADE

Of the Buccaneers

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

*Who wrote "Bonnie Prince Charlie"
and other well-received books.*

TALBOT threw crabs for the third time, and made an outward, refusing motion with his hands.

"Nay, Robin. The dice won't favor me today. Pick up the money." He yanked his gloves from his sword-belt. "I've tarried too long already. I've to ride half the night through."

"Aye, the second half," said Robert Butterwalk. "But the first half, I'll warrant, will be spent under old Abergavenny's roof."

He shook his large, moist head; and there was worriment in his eyes. He was fond of his friend, and proud of him. They had hunted the otter together, as boys. Robert Butterwalk still hunted the otter, and grew fat; but Talbot Slanning, very grand in his new clothes, had made a tour of the Continent, in the course of which he had become an orphan, and also—though he didn't learn either fact until his return—a pauper. Now Talbot Slanning was a gentleman in the household of the Earl of Sussex, and not infrequently galloped through the West Country on his master's business, a penniless young man, but a gay one. To Robert Butterwalk, the stay-at-home, he was a drop splashed from the distant, fabulous court when as today he drew rein in Chagford for a beaker of sack and a half hour at hazard.

Robert said: "I don't like it." When he was worried, he was worried all over, just as when he was happy, he laughed from hair to feet.

"Think ye that Katherine will lure me to my ruin, eh?"

Still Robert shook his head. "Gillard," he muttered.

Talbot frowned. "He's still about?"

"Aye. He has a shallop at Dartmouth. Says it trades with the Low Countries; but it's the opinion of all men hereabout that it's not more nor less than a pirate vessel."

"Likely."

"Tis called *Gillard's Pride*. But Tom's here full half the days; and when he's here, he's mostly at Abergavenny Manor."

Talbot said confidently: "Pirate or no, he wastes his time there. Kate will have naught of him."

"Aye, and it's just that which troubles me. Gillard's a man who dislikes opposition. He and his bullies—"

"Out upon him and his bullies! There's law in this county!"

"Which Tom Gillard controls. Forget not that he has more than bullies. There's his cousins, thick as raisins in a cake, and every man-jack of them glittering bright in some particular corner of the court. Eh, why they tell me that Sir Francis Monckton himself is a cousin of Gillard's, and is to bide with him this very night."

"I care not for Frank Monckton," Talbot muttered.

But he did care. For he knew the influence that suave dandy exercised with the Queen. Everybody knew it. Leicester himself trembled at the thought, even though nominally at least Monckton was a member of Leicester's own party. So Monckton and Tom Gillard were kin!

ROBERT BUTTERWALK picked up the money. Suddenly he chuckled, and his flesh appeared to leap and shake in eager sympathy with this new mood.

"Gillard was here yesternight, late. Methinks he'd come from a-courting

Kate, though he'd not admit it. He was black as any thundercloud. Threw some coins on the table and called for dice."

"And you bettered him?"

"I won twenty-two harrynobles, and then I wagered them all in one cast against the pistola he carried." Robert chuckled again, producing the weapon. "Mine now! A beauty, eh?"

Talbot eyed this pistol with interest, but also with no little repugnance. It was Italian, a blue steel barrel about eighteen inches long, resting on carved Circassian walnut. The huge fishtail butt was made of bone and ivory.

"Shouldst never carry it with thee, Robin," Talbot warned gravely. "That thing's dangerous."

"Aye, but it's beautiful too."

He fondled the weapon, proudly, tenderly, like a woman with some new piece of fine clothing.

"Dangerous," Talbot repeated. He had little respect for the tricky, awkward, thundering contraptions in which gunpowder was used. "Well, I'll away." He pulled on a glove, slapped his friend's shoulder. "Eat not overmuch of the junket and cream, Robin, else when next I see thee, thou'lt be fat as any Herefordshire sow."

IT was good to be in Chagford again, to smell the honeysuckle and see the tall hedgethorns, and smile at old familiar faces. It was good to cast at hazard with Robert Butterwalk, and watch old Featherhaugh bob, and call a greeting to Tim the 'ostler. Talbot never had a serious thought of returning to Chagford and spending the rest of his life there, like Robert, hunting, guzzling cider, bowling on the green through long sunlit afternoons. No, the city was his place—the larger, livelier world, the swirl of war and politics, the court, the glitter of personages around the greatest glitter of all, that was the Queen. He'd been seven years away from Devonshire, and it was only a blurred though pleasant memory to him—an echo of drowsy sounds, the pleasant warm smell of things growing—except when as today, he rode through on an errand, and paused at Chagford to exchange greetings and to visit Katherine Abergavenny.

Chiefly to visit Katherine. In the Earl's household it was well understood that young Slanning should be sent into the West Country as often as this could

conveniently be arranged; and Sussex himself never gave him such a mission without a sly smile and a wink at those who stood near by. Oh, it was well enough known, in London as in Chagford, where Talbot Slanning's heart inclined! But he did not care. He was very happy today.

HE was a shade less happy when he stepped out into the highroad and encountered Thomas Carew Gillard of Gillard's Elms.

"Ho! Business brings ye here, Slanning?"

Gillard had only just dismounted and was approaching the door of the Three Crowns, intent upon refreshment. Now he paused, arms akimbo. Even in the company of Talbot Slanning, who was slim and of normal height—though he looked a shade taller by reason of his erectness—Thomas Carew Gillard was enormous. Not fat, either. There was no fat on him. He was huge, and darkened by weather; his hands were big, his neck and wrists thick; and his legs, swathed in blue galligaskins and crimson base-hose, were bulging masses of muscle.

He was wearing a paned leather doublet, a blue velvet mandilion slashed with silver lace, a rose in his blue velvet bonnet; yet for all this brave attire, his face was grim, his brow squeezed low. He was a man eternally truculent, forever prepared to cut or thrust, or if need be to punch or scratch or kick or bite. His eyes, which were small, were very dark blue, in some lights an angry purple. His mouth was long and unmercifully straight. His beard, once dark brown but bleached an irregular yellow by the sun, was hard, stiff, coarse. There were gold rings in his ears.

He made no effort to be friendly.

"Riding to London?"

"Aye. An the lord of these parts gives me his gracious permission to do so?"

"Riding *direct* to London?"

"Mayhap."

Gillard moved a little closer, moved with tiny, almost imperceptible steps. For all his size, he could be as light as a cat, and just as quick.

"'Mayhap,' eh? Heed ye, Slanning, 'twould be well that ye ride without pause!"

Talbot laughed in his face.

"You've come from Katherine, and your soul's sore after another rebuff.

Well, work your ill humor off on mine host Featherhaugh. I've no time."

He brushed past the giant, and mounted. Tim the 'ostler gazed up at him, frightened: Talbot tossed him a copper.

Gillard called: "'Twould be well that ye rode past Abergavenny Lane without pause."

Talbot turned in saddle.

"Do you threaten me then, Tom Gillard? Wouldst ruffle me, right here on the highroad? Nay, I'll dismount and show ye how a rapier's used, an that's what ye seek."

"I've said my say."

"Oho! Then I'll say mine!" Talbot was angry, though all this time his mouth smiled. "I ride to London, but I stop to visit Katherine. And Katherine, mark ye, Gillard—Katherine Abergavenny within the month will be my bride!"

YET as Talbot rode up Abergavenny Lane, he told himself that he should have played the diplomat. He should have smiled, and been evasive; and this not for his own protection, nor even for Katherine's,—she was safe enough,—but because of Katherine's father, that genial widower and fond parent, aged, somewhat deaf, increasingly weak, always interested in local sports and the breeding of his livestock. Yes, it was for William Abergavenny he should have had consideration. This and only this was the reason why he and Katherine had not announced, months earlier, their determination to marry.

Everybody suspected it. Now Gillard knew. And Gillard was a man to be feared; for he was no bagpipe, all wind and noise; whatever his bluster, he was by no means an empty threat. The heart of him, whenever he thought himself crossed by anybody about anything whatever, could be black and bitter as gall. He could strike, and strike hard, and keep striking. Also he was shrewd: he would have guessed that what Talbot and Katherine most feared was his own ability to hurt William Abergavenny.

Yes, assuredly Talbot should have controlled his temper. He should have held his tongue, he realized as he rode up Abergavenny Lane. He was becoming altogether too high-spirited and cocksure, now that he was a gentleman of the great world.

Her father, in the entrance hall, startled him with congratulations.

"Oho! Katty's told me, Talbot boy; and there's not a man more pleased in all the kingdom. For mark you, the one thing I feared was that Katty would favor the suit of that Gillard hulk who's been lumbering about here all too often. He was here but yesternight—aye, and again this very afternoon." William Abergavenny beamed near-sightedly. "And d'ye know what Katty told him? Told him to begone and not return! Told him she was sick of his glowering face, and that she wouldn't have him if he was the last man left on 'earth, and that she was going to be your bride! Eh-eh!" A round, juicy chuckle came in leisurely fashion from somewhere deep inside of him. "I overheard it. 'Twas how I learned. Katty says she'd have told me anyway."

Talbot said hastily: "I had planned to ask you, sir, but—"

"Eh-eh! Don't be overpolite, Talbot boy. For ye know as well as I do that Katty would have her way even if I was to bellow objections for a week on a week. But I'd never object. Not when it's you she's picked. On my fay, 'twould have tickled thy father to hear of it too, an he was alive still. Oh, I make no doubt you'll be poor enough! But so ye be happy about it, that's what tallies. And when I die, as soon I may, this place at least will be Katty's. You'll tarry the night?"

"Nay, I can linger but a few hours. Milord of Sussex bade me make all speed, for he needs every gentleman about him these days, what with Leicester's men growling and snarling."

"You mislike Leicester, eh? Well, that's a small matter to us out here in Devon, how ye squabble amongst yourselves, all ye peacocks of the court. We care not, so ye leave us to our quiet. But if you've only a few hours, you'll not be wishing me here to chatter up the time. There's a sick pig back in the stable yard I'd be having a peek at before 'tis too dark."

THEN Katherine appeared.

Katherine Abergavenny was tallish, rather slim, with the short round hips of a boy, and long boyish legs. Her hair was so very dark a brown that in some lights it seemed almost black; and her eyes were dark hazel; and her mouth was red, small, serious. But then, her whole expression, and her manner habitually, was one of great seriousness. Just now, for all the simple taffeta, and

for all the simplicity of her walk too, she looked so lovely, so stately and even queenly as she came down the dim old staircase, that Talbot Slanning knew with a thrill of pride that here was a woman who would grace any court.

Not that Katherine Abergavenny, as his wife, was likely ever to be called to the great court itself. Talbot knew this; and probably she knew it too, and did not care. For Elizabeth was not overfond of beautiful women who happened also to be the beloved wives of handsome courtiers. Indeed, Talbot was tolerably certain (though he never mentioned this to Katherine) that their marriage would mean the end of his ambition to become a gentleman-pensioner in attendance upon the Queen herself. Such an appointment, now, would mean a preliminary understanding, none the less firm for being unspoken, that he would keep his wife far away, pretending to have lost interest in her because of his bedazzlement by the Queen's Majesty. And this he had no intention of doing. For while he was a lively admirer of Elizabeth, and as patriotic as the next man, he could not at any time pretend that a bald, skinny, black-toothed, pockmarked female, for all the royal blood that ran in her veins, was a more desirable person than Katherine Abergavenny. A courtier he might be, and so implicitly, and inevitably, something of a liar; but a lie so great as this he would have esteemed a major sin.

SHE went into his arms without hesitation.

"I told Father everything."

Talbot nodded.

"Aye. He told me. He has gone out to nurse a sick pig."

"I told Tom Gillard too, this very afternoon."

Again he nodded.

"I told Gillard myself, in front of the inn. Rest thy conscience, sweet. He was sure to know, and sure to be angry, no matter from whom he learned it."

"Father has no fear of him. Calls him a bundle of empty threats." She sighed. "But I tremble, all the same."

He laughed, kissed her, tried to be reassuring.

"John Gilbert's brother has returned from Ireland," he told her. "He's a knight now, and always he had the Queen's ear. Well, Humphrey Gilbert loved my father, and he's been kind to me. I'll speak to him."

"Dost think he can—"

"Monckton! Francis Monckton's the man! He'd oust Leicester from the high place, an he was able to do so. He's working for that. But first he must gather around him a true party, men upon whom he can place faith."

"But surely, Talbot, thou'dst not—"

"Nay, sweet, I'll not be offering my own services to Frank Monckton! I'm Sussex's gentleman, and that I'll remain. But Humphrey Gilbert is of no party. He teeters. And Monckton's looking for just such men. So methinks a proper talk with Sir Humphrey, who for the love that he bore my father will make the request of Frank Monckton—methinks this will leash the Gillard hound, eh? Monckton's his cousin, ye know. They told me at the inn that Monckton tarries at Gillard's Elms this very night. And he's too great a power for even Tom Gillard to defy. Oh, thy father will be safe enough, sweet!"

He kissed her again, and pressed an arm around her shoulders, and he led her to a settle, from where through the casement they could watch the moon rise over Abergavenny Lane.

"Thou knowest that whatever the obstruction, I'd be thy bride, Talbot. Thou knowest it. I only feared for Father."

"Nay, he'll be as safe as thyself, sweet. It means only a little work, a little whispering."

In fact, it would mean much more than this. It would mean, for example, a considerable sum of money for bribes; and Talbot didn't know where he could get money. But he told her nothing of this.

"Tom Gillard growls because he hopes that will frighten us away. But when it's all over, my sweet, he'll subside. I'll be back within the week. I swear it. Milord of Sussex has been expecting some such petition, and I know he'll grant it me."

"Within the week," she murmured, and snuggled closer.

"And we'll publish the banns here in Chagford. And after the joining, sweet, there'll be no man in all the world who'll be as happy as Talbot Slanning!"

She smiled in the dim light, and was silent. And he kissed her and talked foolishness to her, and they forgot about Thomas Carew Gillard and were very happy together, while the moon rose.

Once she stirred, glancing toward the entrance hall.

"Father takes a long time tending that pig—"

"I make no doubt he's inspecting the stables again. He knows I have but a little time to spend with thee, and he is kind."

The moon had risen, shone for a short space, and then apologetically retreated behind a cloud, by the time Katherine and Talbot at last made farewell. The moldy old manor was very quiet. William Abergavenny was not in the stables nor in the stable yard when Talbot went out to saddle his own horse. Talbot stopped at the front entrance for one final kiss.

"Father hath not returned," she whispered anxiously.

"I make no doubt he's tiptoed in by the back door and gone up to his own chamber. If there's no candlelight in his window, I'll hallo him as I go down to the highroad."

ABERGAVENNY LANE was a narrow and deep cut, lined with hedgethorns and tiny ferns and wildflowers. This night it was wet and slimy, for there had been heavy rains in the afternoon; and because of this, and also because of the absence of moonlight, Talbot walked his mare toward the highroad. The lane, he knew from experience, was blotched by holes deep enough to stog any horse.

At the first sharp curve, from where he knew he could see the windows of William Abergavenny's bedchamber, he turned. It was this turn which saved his life. For it faced him fairly into a man springing upon him from one of the banks.

Talbot, jumping backward, felt something graze his right elbow. Then something struck him on the back of the left shoulder. He fell to hands and knees in the mud; and even as he fell, another bludgeon caught him just above the right ear and set his whole head singing. He rolled sidewise, thumping against a pair of legs.

The space was narrow, the darkness almost complete. There was no room to draw, but Talbot succeeded in snickering out his dagger, and with this he slashed wildly at the legs. There was a screech of pain. Talbot rolled back—barely in time to miss another clubbing from above.

He got to his feet, cursing. Three blurred figures he saw, one of them very close. But now there was room to draw,



and with a Spanish rapier in his fist, Talbot Slanning would have laughed to meet half a regiment.

Even in that dark place the ruffians must have seen the blade flash. Perhaps they had heard of the Slanning swordsmanship. Perhaps fighting any man face to face, whatever the odds, was not to their fancy. They disappeared into the foliage.

They went west, away from the highroad. Talbot could hear them crashing through the hedgethorn and scrambling up the steep embankment. He went after them.

"Stand, ye mongrels!"

Scratched and panting, he emerged upon the edge of an unexpectedly serene meadow, and paused, peering. It was as he'd supposed. Three shadows, one limping far behind the others, were making for a little wood to the west. The highroad, and beyond it Deathick Wood, offered a nearer and safer shelter; but these fellows were hasting to their master, to the man who had sent them out. On the other side of that nameless clump of trees was Gillard's Elms.

All thought of being a diplomat, of being patient and evasive, was forgotten. Talbot, mad with rage, would have dashed across the meadow and straight for Tom Gillard's house, had he not at this moment heard a groan from the bushes behind him.

Back through the hedgethorn he crashed; and he found William Abergavenny by the side of the lane not more than a few feet from the scene of the fight. The squire lay on his back. His head was sticky with blood, and he'd been badly bruised and shocked, but a quick examination convinced Talbot that no bones were broken.

"I didn't see 'em. . . . Came at me from behind."

"There's no need to see them, sir." Talbot's eyes were like frosty steel, and his mouth was taut. "I know where they came from."

The two staggered back to the manor house, the older man leaning heavily upon Talbot, who shouted for Katherine to open the door. And presently

there were servants everywhere, and William Abergavenny's wounds were being cleansed and bandaged.

"Thinkest thou 'twas Gillard? I'll send that—"

"Send naught, sir! For within the hour he'll not be alive to receive it!"

William Abergavenny would recover. This was all Talbot wished to know; and he started away. Katherine came hurrying to him.

"Remember that thou must be calm, and patient, and—"

"A pox on patience! There's been overmuch of it already!"

He pushed past her and went with long strides down the soggy lane to the place where he'd left his horse. She ran after him, calling: "Talbot! Talbot, my love! *They'll kill thee!*"

But he had mounted and was lost among the shadows.

FIFTEEN minutes later Talbot was kicking the door of Gillard's Elms. A menial without livery opened for him, demanded his mission, and when Talbot would have pushed past him, grabbed his shoulder. Talbot punched the servant squarely in the mouth; and the man, sitting down, stared dazedly at the opposite wall.

Thomas Carew Gillard and his guest were sharing a decanter of wine in the dining-hall, but were nevertheless seated close together and conversing in whispers. Their heads jerked around when Talbot stamped in, and both men rose. Gillard was truculent, accusing. But on the countenance of Sir Francis Monckton there was only polite astonishment and no alarm.

"Draw, you pirate! Have out here and now!"

Talbot's rapier appeared, exquisitely bright. Gillard, who seemed almost to have expected this, was not three seconds slower. He started toward Talbot as Talbot started toward him.

"Gentlemen, *stop!*"

The Queen's favorite stepped quickly between them, both arms raised. He had a manner. He was born to command men. He had scarcely raised his voice, yet the two points dropped, the swordsmen paused. Behind Talbot the servant, mouth bloody, eyes aflame with rage, appeared with a halberd snatched from a panoply in the entrance-hall; but him Monckton halted with a glance.

"Tut, good gentlemen! Would ye brawl like drunken apprentices?"

He stood tall and keen, utterly cool. His voice was not mild, yet neither was it blustery. His head was stiff on his shapely neck, and his eyes moved back and forth from one ruffler to the other, while mentally he debated the situation. He was an extraordinarily handsome man, and he knew it, and the Queen knew it, and indeed all England was equally well aware of the fact; but he must have known that the beauty of Leander and the prestige of Majesty itself would not prevent these two men from fighting.

"At the least," Monckton said, "permit me, as an impartial witness, to hear the tale back of these high words." He addressed himself to Talbot: "You, sir? You fancy yourself wronged?"

Talbot, quieter outwardly, told his story in spurts, hot and jerkily, concealing nothing. Francis Monckton listened in just-sympathetic-enough silence, nodding thoughtfully from time to time, his almond-shaped eyes fixed upon the speaker.

Afterward Monckton turned to his host.

"You deny this, Tom?"

Gillard snarled: "I deny nothing and affirm nothing! He wishes to fight? Excellent! I'll fight him broadsword and buckler, rapier and dagger, or with brochieros or rondaches or capas—whatsoever manner he desires, so that it be instanter and to the death!"

"Tush, Tom! Thou soundest the drunken apprentice again."

The favorite stroked with a forefinger the crisp blond hairs at his chin. Presently he turned to bow before Talbot.

"It appears you gentlemen will fight, whatever the provocation, eh? Well then, Master—uh—Master Slanning—if upon your return to your lodgings, you will dispatch a servant to—"

"I have no servant. I have no lodgings hereabout. And I seek not a Sellinger's Round or a plating of zitherns and virginals before steel is crossed. I'll fight here and I'll fight now!"

"Aye," Gillard said quickly, "here and now!"

MONCKTON was troubled. He was in Devonshire on a series of visits arranged for the purpose of forming a personal party in the coming Parliament, and he was attended only by four bodyservants, none of them of gentle blood. In consequence there was nobody to whom he could appeal. The

prospect of a duel did not please him. The Queen had scant respect for the custom—"a waste of good swordsmen, sirrah!"—and trouble of some sort certainly would come out of this night's affray. The favorite himself would be involved, however innocently. The best he could do, he decided, was make the affair as nearly regular as was possible in the circumstances.

"Are ye men of breeding, or are ye village broilsters? Know ye not that there can be no meeting in the house of one of the parties?"

"We'll go outside," Gillard suggested.

Talbot nodded promptly.

Sir Francis Monckton cried: "But there's no spot the rain hasn't reached! And wet grass or the mud of a lane—"

"There's the Three Crowns," Gillard said. "Old Featherhaugh will not like it, I wot, but his long room upstairs has a half-dozen of candle-branches, and the floor's firm and straight. Thou'lt act for me, Frank?"

Francis Monckton shrugged and smiled wryly, but with a resigned inclination of the head. He did not like to do this; but Thomas Carew Gillard had connections he could not afford to antagonize.

"And you, Master Slanning?"

"Nay, I need no one."

Sir Francis said sharply: "I'll not consent to act unless you are represented, sir, by somebody of gentle blood."

Talbot considered for a moment, frowning. He was impatient of all this delay and fuss.

"There's my friend Robert Butterwalk. His station is sufficient."

"Ah, but do you suppose that this good Master Butterwalk will be at home tonight? And does he live hereabout?"

"He'll be at the Three Crowns," Talbot promised. "He's always to be found there at this hour."

It dashed the favorite's final hope. Again he shrugged. He signaled to the menial of the bleeding mouth.

"Nay, call not one of my own men, but you yourself fetch me my long Spanish cloak, and a domino, pray."

For the very sight of a man like Sir Francis Monckton in a public place like the Three Crowns might create such excitement as to make it difficult to obtain privacy. Besides, he did not wish to be recognized. There was still a chance that this affair would end without a killing; and if so, it might be possible to keep it forever quiet. The favorite was

garbed in what was for him humble attire. He wore a white brocaded doublet with a raised pattern, lined with pinkish lilac sarsenet; down the front, from ruff to peascod, ran a row of pearl-cluster rosettes, eighteen of them in all. His black silk trunk hose, like his black velvet sword-belt, was embroidered with gold lace; and his rapier was an original Di Brescia, gold and polychromatic enamels studded with diamonds. Over all this he threw the Spanish cloak, pulling its broad sable collar close about his face. He tugged on a pair of buff leather gamashes. He raised a mask.

"Come." There was a wistful sigh in his voice. "Sheathe first, for I'll have no brawling on the path. This side of me, Tom—and you, Master Slanning, on the other side."



CHAPTER II

ROBERT BUTTERWALK grinned across an apple dumpling and a mug of rough cider.

"Is it this ye call riding straight for London? Did I not predict that—" He saw Gillard and the masked stranger. "Oh," he whispered. "Hast been ruffling it, Tally?"

Talbot leaned close. There were fifteen or sixteen men in the room, and he did not wish to be overheard.

"Upstairs and now, Robin. Wilt act—eh, friend?"

Robert Butterwalk rose, shaking his head.

"I like it not. Thou knowest I'd refuse thee naught, Tally, but can it not be so arranged that—"

"Nay, Robin. Fight I must, and now. Thou'rt sober?"

"Oh, aye. I'm sober as any curate at a Shrove Tuesday hymning. Upstairs, eh? Old Featherhaugh will quiver through a score of fits ere this night's work's finished, I wot."

Perhaps he did not tell the strict truth. The shock of Talbot's announcement had made him seem sober, and feel so; and in the general excitement nobody observed that his step was not even, nor was his hand steady as he mounted the stairs.

The public room buzzed eagerly, questioningly, behind them. Old Featherhaugh fussed here and there, lighting candles from a taper which trembled as he held it. He had ordered his assistants away from the upstairs chamber, and garrulously saw in person to the comfort of these unexpected guests. Precisely what was about, he could not know; but he could make a tolerably accurate guess. Like everybody else in and around Chagford, he had heard of the sharp words that afternoon between Talbot Slanning and Tom Gillard; and he knew both young men, had known them for years. A reconcillation, he was aware was not a thing to be expected. It was more likely that this gathering meant discussion of a more violent sort.

"I will remain to attend your wants, gentlemen," he quavered.

The man behind the mask said with impeccable politeness: "Nay, good mine host, 'twill not be necessary."

There were six candle-branches with seven candles to the branch, and Featherhaugh lighted every one. He was awkward and slow about it, partly because of his nervousness, partly because he sought to delay this mysterious conference and was loath to quit the upper chamber.

"One of my waiters, then? He could fetch ye some capon and dumplings, good milords? And wines—what wine would ye have, eh?"

"None," said the man with the mask.

"No wine?"

"None. Pray leave us in peace, good mine host."

Featherhaugh flared, briefly, somewhat hysterically.

"Aye, leave ye in peace, that I'll do! But is't your purpose to *remain* in that blessed state, milords? I'll have no—"

Tom Gillard started toward him.

"Get out!"

Featherhaugh got out. All of his employees and most of his customers of the night were gathered just outside the door, and he shushed them angrily away, sending them back downstairs. But he himself—he remained at the door! He heard the bolt thrown from the inside. Then he heard somebody pull shut the window curtains. All this while he leaned against the door as much for physical support as because he desired to get his ear closer to the sounds; and his face was hot and shiny with sweat, and his lips moved in prayer.

Sir Francis Monckton, when the bolt had been drawn, lowered his mask and threw off his cloak. He bowed before Robert Butterwalk.

"It is a great honor to act with you, sir. I am Francis Monckton, gentleman-pensioner to Her Gracious Majesty the Queen."

Robert was astounded. He blinked, mouth open, eyes enormous. But he managed a bow.

"I am Robert Butterwalk, an esquire of Chagford, sir."

FORMALLY—Monckton with swift white fingers, Robert with sweaty hands that shook—they examined each principal's doublet in order to be certain that neither wore a brigandine. They compared the swords: these were of the same length, each swept-hilted, with long quillons, though Gillard's was slightly heavier.

"It is your privilege, sir," Monckton told Talbot in a voice that betrayed some hope, "to refuse to fight unless these weapons be of an exactly similar weight."

"I care not," Talbot said.

Nor did he. This was no gesture of bravado. Rapier-fighting still was new in England, where many an old warrior scoffed at it as an effeminate importation; and masters of the fence were not numerous, even in London. At the academy of one of these, Rowland Kirke, Gillard had been a student, and had come to be rated as a provost: this Talbot knew. But Talbot himself had studied under the greatest masters of all, the *spadacinos* of Italy, and notably under Viggiani and the incomparable Giovanni dell' Agocchie. To Talbot, therefore, the average Englishman with a sword was a blundering, stamping boy. So far from thinking that a heavy blade gave Tom Gillard any advantage, Talbot believed in the lightest weapon commensurate with sturdiness.

Each man carried also a cinquedea with a thirteen-inch blade, which he was to be permitted to hold sword-fashion in his left hand.

"Methinks 'twill not be amiss if ye both see that my pistola's here also," Robert Butterwalk said, and produced the weapon.

Talbot objected angrily.

"Nay, put it away, Robin! Thou'lt be having it explode!"

But Francis Monckton, who had quite naturally taken over supervision of the

whole affair, and who was the final court for all decisions, supported Robert. Indeed, Monckton brought forth a tiny silver pistol of his own, and thoughtfully examined its priming.

"Nay, Master Butterwalk is right. The representatives should be otherwise armed than with their blades. 'Tis the way they are doing it now in France."

Talbot, for his part, cared not a snort how they were doing it in France, but was eager only to cross rapiers with Tom Gillard.

"You will stand at this end of the room, Tom. And you, Master Slanning, at this other end. So! You will both advance and engage at will when I call the signal. Then you will fight until one of you is unable to fight longer. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Robert Butterwalk dumped the fine powder into the priming pan of his pistol, and cocked the thing, and held it horizontally, aiming at nothing. He blinked from one principal to the other.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" he repeated after Monckton.

THE long room at the Three Crowns, Chagford, really was long—full forty feet, the same length as the inn itself. It was perhaps eighteen feet wide. The floor was quartered oak, rich and smooth, but not slippery. The walls were panelled in oak, and the plaster ceiling was richly patterned. Rich red curtains of Utrecht velvet covered the windows, which were set in a succession of canted bays over the high-street. At one end, Gillard's end, was an ornate fireplace, but there was no fire, for the May night was mild and warm. The candle-branches were set on small tables, regularly spaced, and the candles cast a full, quiverless light.

"Gentlemen?"

Talbot nodded impatiently. Tom Gillard grunted.

"Draw, then! Advance and fight! And God be with ye!"

Old Featherhough, so soon as he heard the first scrape of steel, started to pound the door. "*Stop, milords! Stop!*" But nobody in the long room paid him the slightest attention. . . .

The master of Gillard's Elms came in quickly, with legs spread wide, like a man who wades in haste through shallow water. He held his rapier high, the point directed at Talbot's face. The cinquedeas he kept close to his left hip, point out.

Talbot moved slower, heel-and-toeing it with tiny steps. He held his guard low, the point raised. He was thinking that Gillard apparently was one of the older rough-and-tumble fighters, given to many passes, close engagement, much cutting and much beating of the blade. Gillard would count, as he always counted, upon his size and strength and his greater reach.

Gillard tried four slashes for the head, which Talbot avoided easily by stepping backward. This placed Talbot near his end of the room, so that he could not afford to retreat much farther. And then, as he had expected, Tom Gillard closed in, thrusting full-length.

Talbot parried without difficulty but found he could not free his blade for a riposte. Gillard had circled his point twice, pinning Talbot's guard to his own, so that their right hands, like their faces, were not more than an inch apart. But Gillard was not so fast with the dagger. Talbot avoided a cinquedeas thrust, though placing himself in such a position that his own cinquedeas was useless. Gillard, startled, scarcely able to believe that his attack had failed, instinctively released the pressure on Talbot's sword and sprang back, raising his guard.

Talbot smiled a slow, grim smile. He'd been at Tom Gillard's mercy for an instant there, had Gillard but known it.

But now, before Gillard could recover from his momentary confusion, Talbot himself moved in.

Death had been so close that Talbot felt cold all over, as though the black angel actually had touched him in passing. There must be nothing more like that. This fellow was faster, cleverer, than Talbot had anticipated; and the fight must be carried to him.

"Milords! Open, I pray ye! I'll have no brawling here!"

Robert Butterwalk waved his huge pistol and danced up and down in an agony of suspense and fright. His mouth was open, and he made curious little gurgling sounds in his throat.

The handsomest man in England remained motionless and calm—all except his eyes, which danced with excitement.

GILLARD, a bit bewildered by the brilliance of Talbot's counter-attack, retreated, parried, retreated, never getting an opportunity to riposte. It was a new experience for him, to be backing away from an antagonist. Slowly, and with an even greater surge of anger than

he had yet felt, he realized what he was doing. He grunted, and his chin sank a trifle. He stood against a rush, tried to parry with his dagger alone, and slashed at Talbot's head. The rapier caught only Talbot's cinquedeas, causing sparks to fly, while Talbot's blade licked in and out of the big man's left shoulder. Gillard fell back barely in time to save his life. Talbot's point, meant for the throat, grazed the Gillard chin then, and blood began to pour from the cut.

Gillard's measure was longer than Talbot's—his arms and legs were longer. As he stood at bay, desperate, aware that the fireplace was close behind him and that further retreat would be fatal, he was a dangerous man to try to reach. A trick was needed.

Talbot stooped far down, his sword-guard low, his dagger high, and pretended to lose his balance, so that he was forced to put his right hand to the floor. His sword-point was lowered, as though from the effort to recover balance.

Tom Gillard did exactly what Talbot had expected. He stepped on the sword-blade with his left foot, pressing it against the floor, and at the same time swung high his right shoulder, raising his own sword for a terrific down blow.

Talbot was perfectly prepared for this. Gillard wore soft white leather pantofles, and the floor was smooth oak. Talbot had figured that a jerk would free the blade and throw him far enough back to permit him to outstep Gillard's blow and at the same time raise his point so that Gillard, by the force of his attack, would be skewered upon it. A perfect example, Talbot thought, of the superiority of the point over the edge.

YES, he had estimated that a jerk would free the blade; but he had not supposed that it would free it without resistance; and he jerked mightily, with all his strength.

He never knew whether Tom Gillard had been off balance at that instant, so that his weight no longer was on his left foot, or whether Gillard with unaccustomed wit had seen through the trick and released that pressure purposely.

Whatever the reason, the blade came free without a tug; and Talbot, amazed, staggered half the length of the chamber, waving both arms wildly in an attempt to regain his balance.

Gillard, had he been prepared, could have ended the fight. As it was, he paused a fleet second after his own blow

had found only air. And when he did spring forward, cutting furiously, it was too late.

Talbot sat upon the floor with a bang. But he scrambled to one knee; and his sword-arm was raised, his guard high, when Gillard's attack came. In that position, as he himself knew, he was safe enough. He could meet and parry any attack, though he could not return it until he was able to regain his feet.

BUT Robert Butterwalk did not comprehend this. To Robert, crazed by anxiety and excitement, befuddled still by cider, it seemed that his friend was helpless—that Tom Gillard was about to slaughter a man who was down.

"Hi! You can't do that!"

He stepped forward, waving the pistol. Sir Francis Monckton sprang to his side, spun him around, threw up the pistol-arm.

"You fool! Put that—"

Nobody ever was to learn how it happened. The thing had been cocked and was hair-triggered, so possibly the mere motion of Robert's arm was responsible. Or possibly Robert did pull the trigger.

Whatever the cause, the hammer fell. There was a wheezy, whirring sound; a column of minute blue sparks rose briskly, slantingly, and the pan powder flashed. With a terrific roar the overcharged weapon was thrown up so that the end of the barrel struck Robert on the chin, stunning him. And Sir Francis Monckton went over backward—went rapidly, full-length, as though shoved by a mighty hand. The little silver pistol he had held tinkled to the floor like some forgotten bit of jewelry. The ruff and the upper part of the beautiful white doublet were blackened by gunpowder. The face, too, was utterly black, except for the wide-staring eyes. The throat was torn, though it seemed unable to bleed, perhaps because of the clotted powder, or perhaps because the very heat of the explosion had served in part to cauterize the wound. . . .

Robert Butterwalk was motionless, too dazed to understand what had happened.

Tom Gillard instinctively stepped back several paces before he lowered his rapier.

It was Talbot who went to the body. He leaned close to the hideously twisted and blackened face, and stared into the sightless eyes. He thrust a hand under the doublet. Then he looked up.

"Dead."

Yellow-gray smoke moved languidly about and stretched itself with a tantalizing display of indifference. Echoes of the explosion scurried to rest in remote corners. The hammering on the door, and the shouts of the men outside, had ceased.

"The Queen worshiped that man," Tom Gillard said in a flat, expressionless voice.

He grabbed a chair, and with it smashed the glass out of one of the windows. Then he put a hand on the sill and vaulted. Somebody in the high-street screamed. A horse galloped away.

"He's right," Talbot yelled. He took Robert by both arms, and dragged him toward the shattered window. "There's one chance!"

They landed asprawl. Somebody was silhouetted there in the open inn door, waving his arms, shouting something. Tim the 'ostler was on the ground, his hand pressed against his right cheekbone, and blood oozing between his fingers.

Robert's horse was back in the stables, unharnessed: there would be no time to get it. But Talbot and Gillard and the late Sir Francis Monckton had been careful to leave their steeds saddled and loosely tethered at the hitching-post. Talbot's Spanish jennet was there still, and Monckton's black Hungarian stallion.

"Haste, Robin!"

THE plump youth moved as though in a stupor. He had said never a word: he seemed unable to talk. For a full five minutes, while they slushed through mud, he stared blankly in front of him, sitting bolt upright in saddle and not even touching the reins.

"We—we—where are we going?" he gasped at last.

"To France. We're not safe anywhere in England now."

"I will ride to Exeter. I'll ride to the Sheriff. I'll tell them everything. Thou hast no need to—"

"Useless! There'd be no questions and no trial. There'd not even be an indictment! Whosoever was in that room tonight would be treated to the rack and branding-irons—with a halter for whatever survived. Ride, man!"

Yet at the entrance to Abergavenny Lane Talbot himself came to a halt.

"I turn here. Rack or no rack, I'll not quit England without a word to Katherine. Ride on, Robin."

"Nay, I'll wait for thee."

Abergavenny Manor was dark, silent. Starlight drizzled halfheartedly upon its roofs and gables, and there was an air of drowsy comfort about the whole establishment. Many times afterward, in many strange and remote places, Talbot was to remember the manor as it looked on that night—placid, homelike, and peacefully silent.

HE left his horse at the turn of the lane and ran to the south side of the house. Both of Katherine's windows were open; he rattled the trellis which rose to one of them, and presently she appeared. He cupped his hands to his mouth:

"Come down! The side door—hurry!"

She asked no questions. She was at the side door a moment later, and he had her in his arms.

"There's been fighting? But thou'rt not hurt? Oh, Talbot!" Tears rolled pauselessly down her cheeks, and she stood very close, touching him here and there as though she wished to assure herself that he was really alive. "Thanks to God thou'rt not hurt!"

"The wrong man was hurt," he said. "Aye, and killed. There's been a horrid mischance, my sweet. Frank Monckton is dead."

She did not understand at first. She was not interested in Sir Francis Monckton, and her relief at finding Talbot safe and uninjured had left her dizzy, weak. He shook her gently. His voice was low.

"Didst hear me, sweet? Frank Monckton was killed. Killed! Francis Monckton himself!"

She stepped away, her eyes showing almost black in the darkness. She drew breath as though it caused her pain.

"We go to France—Robin Butterwalk and I."

She said quickly: "I'll go with thee."

But he shook his head. "Nay. For the sake of thy father, if for no other reason, thou must remain. Thy father and thyself, sweet, should have no cause to fear."

Her eyes grew bigger. Her mouth fell open, and she stood stiff.

"No cause to fear?" Her voice was higher now, shriller. "No cause to fear! And thou, my love, sailing in robber vessels to a foreign land, and leaving—"

He put a hand over her mouth, an arm around her shoulders. He held her very close for a moment while she struggled. When she had subsided he released her gently, and kissed her.

"Aye," she murmured, "'tis best." She raised her head. "But thou'lt be careful this time, Talbot?"

"I'll be careful as any merchant. And so soon as ever I get to France I'll write to thee."

He swallowed very hard, tightening his lips. She was calmer now, breathless but determinedly quiet.

"Whatever happens, Talbot—"

"My sweet!"



CHAPTER III

FOR three days Robert Butterwalk had scarcely spoken, scarcely moved, until Talbot began to fear that his companion's mind, admittedly never keen, was quitting him entirely.

"Look up! Look up, Robin, for the love of God! 'Tis bad enough, I wot, without glooming about it by an hour and an hour!"

Robert managed a feeble nod.

"France—" he muttered.

Only a few times in his life had he been even so far away from his home as Plymouth, and he was not able to imagine a foreign land. The thought of travel, adventure, did not exhilarate him.

"France. . . . I'm a murderer."

"Nay, thou'rt no murderer! An accident's not murder, man! Look up, Robin! 'Twill all be well enough soon. The Queen's Majesty will forget it, and in time we'll come slipping back."

Robert did not believe this, and in fact neither did Talbot himself. Elizabeth, by Grace of God, Queen of England and Ireland and France, Defender of the Faith, was indeed no such short-memoried person as Talbot made pretense to think her. She was a Tudor, and a woman to boot; and she would seize the men who played any part in the death of Francis Monckton, no matter what the work and expense, no matter how long the wait. Talbot himself, in his heart, despaired of ever seeing England again.

For three days they had lingered in this bare, close, uncomfortable room above Ned Crocker's wineshop on the Barbican. Only twice in that time had they moved, on warning from Crocker,

who conducted them to a near-by cellar while royal sergeants had searched the wineshop. It had been easy to guess that the fugitives would make for Plymouth, for in that resort of smugglers and pirates, Huguenots, Beggars of the Sea, and merely local desperadoes, lay their one chance of escape. So Plymouth was being scoured for them. The window of the room in which they sat had heavy curtains across it; nor did Robert and Talbot even after dark dare to light a candle.

"Eh, and I wonder if Tom Gillard's got away? He has friends in this city, and his own shallop, if she's in."

There was a knock at the door. Talbot stiffened. Even Robert Butterwalk rose to his feet and quietly drew his sword. Talbot signaled for him to post himself on the far side of the door. Rapier and dagger drawn, Talbot called in a low voice:

"Who's there?"

The answer was faint, muffled. Talbot crossed to the window, opened it wide, and pushed back the curtain. He glanced at Robert, who nodded. Then he went again to the door. He unlatched the door and threw it open, stepping back.

An ape of a man entered. A curiously pale fellow, almost as broad as he was long, he wore a black leather jerkin, huge brown pantaloons, a brown felt hat. Much of his face was hidden by a yellow beard, the hairs of which went in every direction. His eyes were tiny, blue, shrewd. Enormous brass rings dangled from his ears.

"Ah, Captain Vaarts!"

They sheathed their weapons. Talbot closed the door.

Vaarts was a Dutchman produced by the all-knowing and well-paid keeper of the wineshop downstairs, Ned Crocker. He owned a small and very fast galleass, he knew the Channel as well as they themselves knew the lanes of Devonshire, and he was willing, for a consideration, already agreed upon and paid, to take them to France.

"Careful men, eh? Careful fellows!"

V AART'S eyes, so tiny as to be almost lost in the shadow between the hat brim and the mass of whiskers, moved back and forth. He nodded. Possibly he grinned—it was difficult to be sure of this.

Talbot shrugged. He went to the window and closed it again.

"We did not know who it was. Is the boat ready?"

"Ja. Und ter tide goes oudt in half an hour. Ja."

"Good!" Talbot and Robert made for their cloaks. "We'll start now, eh?"

"Nein. First I haff more money."

Talbot scowled. Already they had given him every coin they had between them after paying Ned Crocker. They'd never seen Captain Vaarts before, and they knew they were endangering their lives when they made a contract with him for transportation to the continent. He might yet take them just outside of Plymouth Sound and there murder them, weight their bodies, and toss them overboard, rather than risk conveying men who were obviously sought by the law. It had happened before.

"You've been paid," Talbot said coldly.

"Ja. I am an hones' man. I take you where I tell I take you, ja. But t'en I did not know who you were."

"Oh—you know now, eh?"

"Ja. Und t'e price iss more." He went to the window, cautiously withdrew the curtain, and pointed to a pair of thick-set, watchful men who loitered near by in the light of a quoin cresset. "Everywhere t'ey look for you. Such a mens I muss charge more. *Ja wohl.*"

They could not be angry. They had previously accounted themselves fortunate that they were able to pay for passage, and also pay Crocker the go-between, with what coins they had. It had been little enough. They could not blame Vaarts for demanding more—now that he knew they were not ordinary petty criminals but the very men for whom all England was searching in the name of an angry Queen.

"But we have no more money!"

Vaarts shrugged, and the rings in his ears wagged back and forth. "T'en I not take you." He tossed a leather pocketbook upon the table. "I am hones'. We make no voyage. Ja." He turned.

"Wait!"

Talbot unstrapped his sword-belt, tossed sword and cinquedea and belt upon the table.

"It's from Madrid. I bought it there myself, at the workshop of Sebastian Hernandez. Does that mean anything to you, Captain Vaarts? There's not a finer brace of blades in this world!"

Possibly he overpraised the weapons, but it was true that they were beautiful, and valuable, and that he had purchased

them from the celebrated Hernandez in the days when he still supposed himself a rich young man—before his return to England where he learned that his father was dead and his heritage dissipated.

The seaman's eyes glittered. He knew nothing of the art of these weapons—a stout broadsword or cutlass would be more familiar to him, and he'd regard these things on the table as the fancy toys of fancy gentlemen—but he did know true Toledo when he saw it. More important, he knew gold. He knew the worth of seed pearls, a multitude of which were set along the quillons of the rapier. And diamonds: there was a small diamond at the hilt of each of the matched weapons.

He picked the things up, fondled them. They were exquisite articles, and went to the heart of even this rude fellow.

"Ja, ja! I take t'em. Ja!"

He started to strap the sword-belt about his own waist, but Talbot politely pointed out that he was not wearing a long cloak and that a sea captain with such weapons surely would excite attention.

"When we get there you'll have them."

"Nein! When we get on t'e ship!"

"Agreed. Now lead us the way."

THERE were preliminary instructions: They were to follow the Dutchman, but not too closely. At no time, until they were safe under decks, were they to address to him a single word. And if on the way there was any sort of trouble—street brawls were not uncommon in this seaport—they should not expect him even to recognize them, much less to help them.

"Ja. We go, t'en. On t'e ship you giff me t'em stickers. Ja."

He departed, and a few moments afterward Talbot and Robert strolled after him. Their cloaks were close about them, and they had turned the collars high. It was raining a little, and it was early evening. The waterfront was crowded with apprentices, prostitutes, merchants, mariners, jugglers, pedlars, clerks. The Catwater was crammed with shipping—galleys, shallops, caravels, here a high-sided galleon loaded with pepper and cloves and indigo from the Portuguese Indies, there a huge carrack or a buff-bowed merchantman from the Low Countries. There were smugglers' vessels, and Flemish and Huguenot pirate craft, and hundreds of tiny rowing pin-

naces. Rigging was a mad maze against the evening sky.

Twice they passed royal sergeants who wound in and out of the crowds, hawk-eyed, watchful.

Vaarts turned suddenly to the right and made for a stone quay to which half a dozen small vessels had been warped. Robert and Talbot, starting after him, were stopped by a group of sailors, one of them, a monstrous bellowing fellow, very drunk indeed.

"Oho! Who be these fine scrimps?"

He pushed Robert Butterwalk, who staggered back against Talbot. Talbot bit his lower lip angrily. But his quick temper already had caused much woe, and now above all times, he told himself, he must keep it under control.

He whispered: "Quietly, Robin. . . . Walk around him."

The big fellow stood squarely in their path, swaying.

"Have past, Matt, and haste to the ship with us," one of his companions pleaded, "else we'll lose the tide and the Captain will have the cat across us."

ROBERT started to walk around the trouble-maker, giving him all the room possible. But his foot slipped in the mud, and in an effort to regain his balance he fell against the sailor.

"Oho! 'Tis a ruffle ye'd have, eh?"

The sailor hit Robert with a huge red fist just over the left ear, and Robert fell to hands and knees.

Talbot forgot his good intentions. He punched the sailor twice in the face. The sailor, grunting, more amazed than hurt, retreated several steps. He stared foolishly at Talbot, and blinked a moment. Then, as he began to feel warm blood gathering inside his mouth, and to understand what had happened, he roared like some infuriated beast and charged with both fists flying.

Three times Talbot struck him, each time jolting the big head back. But this was a brute, unfeeling, mad. It charged again; and Talbot in sheer desperation ducked low, grabbed the sailor around the knees, and lifted suddenly with all his strength. He lifted the sailor clear of the ground and hurled him back against a stone hawser-post. After that the sailor did not stir.

Robert was shaking his head, trying to clear his brain, trying to rise. Talbot shuffled close to him but didn't dare reach down to help him. For now the sailors were a wall on all sides. A few

had bludgeons, and Talbot saw one sheath-knife.

"Aside, clods!" he said coldly. "My friend and I go down to that quay, and whoso tries to stop us I'll kill on the spot."

It might have impressed a crowd of West Smithfield roughs, but it was the wrong way to talk to Devonshire sailors.

"He's hurt Matt Coppledick!"

"A high-and-mighty lord, eh? Tells us to get out of his way!"

"He's hurt Matt Coppledick! Are we going to stand by and see him hurt Matt?"

Talbot had no time or space in which to draw. A club struck his neck from behind. Another glanced off his right temple, drawing blood. And then it fairly rained blows. Talbot twisted, turned, punched. He found himself on his knees. He caught a flash of that knife he'd seen earlier, and he squirmed aside barely in time to spare a shoulder its bite. Somebody kicked him in the face.

"Back, ye brawling swine! 'Tis fifteen minutes to the turn of the tide, and here I find ye fighting in the streets! Back!"

Everything became quiet. Talbot, his ears ringing, his mouth and nose running blood, staggered to his feet.

The cause of the peace, in the center of a circle of now respectful sailors, was a very short man with a deep loud voice. He was scarcely more than thirty years old, but obviously he was long accustomed to obedience. Speckless black leather boots encased his thick legs, and his feet were spread wide. His doublet was black and glittered with pearls. His velvet trunk hose were dark purple, and so too was the gold-slashed mandilion which hung jauntily from his left shoulder. He carried no weapon except a Spanish dagger, silver-hilted and encrusted with rubies. On his perfectly round head was a smart Venetian morion which glistened furiously in the light of the torches. His face was extraordinarily red, his trig beard reddish yellow and very stiff, his eyes a steely blue-gray.

"Matt Coppledick, eh? Badly hurt?"

Two of the seamen knelt beside the trouble-maker, examining him with their hands. One said: "Shoulder's broken, sir."

"Take him home, you two. And get ye back to the ships ere the tide turns, else I'll have half the skin off your backs."

He glared at Talbot.

"You did this, eh? Matt Coppledick was one of the heartiest hands I had. Worth two ordinary men. And now when all's ready for us to sail, you must needs be breaking his shoulder. Well, you'll do the work he was to have done."

Clearly he did not understand that he was addressing gentlemen. Talbot and Robert were wrapped from neck to ankle in cloaks bespattered with mud; their boots were masses of mud, too; and their broad-brimmed hats, crushed low on their heads, showed little of their faces; they had been careful to conceal their rapiers.

Talbot started: "An you'll but listen—"

"No time!" The Captain addressed the men at large, pointing to Robert and Talbot. "Take them to the *Pascha*. I've the authority. Hasten, ye wine-sogged good-for-naughts!"

Something soft, yet devastating hit Talbot on the back of the head. Dizzy, he spun around, raising his fists. As though from a great distance he heard the Captain's voice: "Don't beat them so they'll be of no service, ye blundering dogs!" Then blackness came like a roaring freezing wind.

CHAPTER IV

THE Captain was very well pleased with himself as he sat sipping canary, nibbling the last piece of fresh bread he would have in many weeks, and staring through the stern windows at the twenty-five-ton *Swan*. Beyond the following *Swan*, cloudy gray in the early morning light, was the diminishing blur of Mount Edgumbe. He was contented. Once more he was master of himself and of the men about him, answerable only to God in heaven. At sea there were no commissioners, no politicians, no quibbling investors. The last few weeks had been especially trying; for orders had come, then counter-orders, then counter-counter-orders; and there had been a welter of subdued fuss. It had seemed for a time that all the world was in conspiracy against this voyage, possibly because all the world was suspicious of its purpose.

Two persons only knew the Captain's plans—himself and a woman. The woman, *being* a woman, had backed and filled, blown hot and blown cold; in the morning, filled with enthusiasm, she had

smiled upon him; by afternoon suspicion and doubt had gripped her again and she was informing him by royal messenger that he must use his ships for the protection of Ireland. Ireland! He had nothing but contempt for that business, just as he had no respect for the petty robbers of the Channel, sniveling thieves who could not see twenty yards beyond their bowsprit grapnels and would cut any designated throat for a handful of coppers. Ireland was not for him, nor the Sleeve either. Vultures might hover there. An eagle should fly far.

Papers! Papers! He'd been deluged with them. Seals and ribbons and signatures, *whereases* and *wherefores*, sent by secretary this or clerk that, commanding one thing, countermanding another, blocking the prospect, unblocking it, the next day blocking it again—until the previous night the Captain had not been sure, for all his careful preparations, whether he would be able to sail. Even at the very last minute there had been a threatened hitch. Some of the men had got drunk, and he himself had gone out into the streets to round them up in time to catch the tide. There had been a brawl, and Matthew Coppledick's shoulder had been broken. And with minutes counting like months, the Captain had done something he did not like to do and ordinarily did not have to do: he'd impressed the nearest two among the brawlers. No doubt they would prove to be lily-handed fellows: they had looked pale, like clerks. Well—he almost smiled as he sipped canary—they would learn. He'd make rich men of them too, or else corpses.

For he knew the Spaniards. This little expedition would be no dance around a Maypole. . . .

There was a shouting, a scuffling, on the deck, and the steel-gray eyes, which had been softly reminiscent, hardened. Right outside of his own cabin! Insolence!

The door flew open. A slim blond young man with blue eyes and a pale face burst into the cabin. His clothes were spattered with mud and blood, and dried blood was clotted at his mouth. His face shone with sweat. His eyes were flames of anger.

"Are you the captain of this boat?"

Francis Drake did not stir; he glanced once at the three men who would have followed this young stranger into the cabin—just once—and they froze on the threshold.

"I am the captain of this ship, yes. And in future thou'lt remove thy hat when addressing me, and call me 'sir'."

The young man pounded the table.

"Don't *thou* me," he stormed. "I know not what your custom is, but I know that it is no custom of mine to submit when vile seamen lay hands on me and rob me of my sword!"

"You carry a sword?"

The Captain, cold and stern, inwardly was troubled. For he saw now that this was no clerk but clearly a person of gentle blood. Of hot blood, too. And there was no greater snob in the world than Francis Drake.

"I *did* carry a sword! And I demand that it be restored to me instant, that the men who assaulted me be punished, and that my companion and myself be set down in France or else transferred to the first ship we speak which is sailing for the Continent!"

"Why d'ye wish to go to France?"

"That's my concern! 'Tis enough for you to see that I get there without delay! After that I'll hear your apology."

Francis Drake leaned over the table and twisted his canary cup around and around. A horrid suspicion was forming in his mind.

"You talk loftily. Who are you?"

For the first time the young man hesitated.

Francis Drake said: "Methinks I know. You are either Master Talbot Slanning, gentleman-pensioner to the Earl of Sussex, or else you are Master Robert Butterwalk of Chagford."

"Yes," Talbot said quietly. He sat down. He closed his eyes, and passed hands heavily across them. "Yes, I am Talbot Slanning. And my companion is Robert Butterwalk."

"Oh," said Francis Drake. He looked at the men in the doorway. "Begone, Tom. Tell Master Oxenham to keep the course I've set. And see that every inch of canvas be spread, even to sewing on full bonnets. We hail nothing and respond to no hail."

AMAZED, Talbot asked: "You're not taking us back?"

"No. But neither am I taking you to France or the Low Countries. I'll run no risk of this enterprise being blocked again."

"But—but where then do we go?"

"We go to the Spanish Indies."

The Spanish Indies! The Americas! The far fabulous isle of screaming sav-

ages, of unicorns, of hurricanes, poisonous jungles. . . . The very other side of the world! Talbot sprang to his feet.

"But this is madness! I've no wish to go to the Indies!"

"That I much regret. You're going, nevertheless. Sit down, Master Slanning, and I'll tell you about it."

THEY restored Talbot's sword—Robert's also, though Robert was too seasick to care. They accepted them as gentlemen-adventurers, unexpected but perhaps not unwelcome members of the company. No mention was ever made of the death of Sir Francis Monckton. Very formally Captain Drake introduced Talbot to his brother Joseph (another brother, John Drake, commanding the following *Swan*, Talbot did not meet until the first landfall) and to the others who ate above the salt at the *Pascha's* table: Ellis Hixom, a grinning young shipbuilder's son from Dartmouth, and John Oxenham, a Devonshire esquire. They drank toasts; they said grave things; they were very polite. However, none of them offered to tell Talbot to what part of the Americas they were going or what they planned to do when they got there. And soon he came to understand that in fact none of them *knew* this—none except the Captain himself.

He was an odd, somber little fellow, that Captain. He sat talking with Talbot after the others had left.

"We have prayers every morning and every evening, on the forward deck," he announced. "You can recite prayers?"

"I—I have never tried."

"You will learn," the Captain promised.

He sat behind his table and studied Talbot for some time.

"We'll have need to find something for you to do during the long days, Master Slanning. Some work, some duty, eh?"

Talbot looked around, waved a hand vaguely.

"I'd supposed I would help you to command the ship."

The Captain almost smiled.

"I see that you are like so many other landmen, and think that the sailing of a ship's a task anybody could learn in a day. A lifetime's needed, Master Slanning!"

Talbot shrugged. Like most of his friends, he never had entertained a high respect for ships and sailing-men.

"I am a courtier," he said, smiling a little. "I have been acting as a confidential messenger for my Lord of Sussex, but here aboard the *Pascha* I take it that no messengers are needed."

"Do you speak Spanish?"

"Aye. For I visited five months in Spain."

"You will teach me. What else do you do?"

Talbot hesitated.

"Well, I was always esteemed an uncommonly good wrestler, and I have yet to meet that man who is my equal with the rapier."

"Ah!"

"I wrestle in the Devonshire manner, but I'm not opposed to the ruling out of kicks. You yourself saw what I did to Coppelick, even when I was cumbered by a long cloak."

"And the rapier?"

"I studied it in Spain and Italy. Vigiani of Bologna did me the honor to rate me a provost, and Gjoanni dell'Agocchie, the great *spadacino* of Venice, twice said that I should soon take my place as a master indeed, did I but persist. I studied more briefly, too, under Camillo Agrippa, when I was in Rome, and under Giacomo di Grassi at Modena."

Francis Drake rose, rubbing his hands together.

"Now, this is good to hear! I have long wished to learn the Spanish method of sword-fighting. 'Tis said they are much superior to the English, for that we rely too heavily upon the edge. These Italians—are they comparable to the Spaniards?"

"Far better. For look ye,"—Talbot drew—"the gentlemen of Madrid favor greatly the *guardia bassa* and are prone to parry with the blades crossed as after a *passo obliquo*, which makes for too slow a riposte. But one who practices the Italian method will rather favor keeping his weapon *di sopra*, unless it fortune that—"

"Nay, nay! Fog me not in those foreign words, but come out on deck and show me with the very weapons, eh? I've some blunted blades here, and bracers and caps."

Mariners gathered in curiosity as Captain Drake ordered a space cleared in the waist, the only level stretch of deck. Talbot, while he affixed his bracer, noted again that all the sailors were young men. He did not see one of them even among the officers, who looked older



than thirty-one or -two. Many were in their 'teens. Captain Drake himself, he had learned, though master of his own ship for these ten years past, was only thirty-two.

"Art ready, Master Slanning? Now if I were to attack this way—"

He came in clumsily. Talbot engaged the blade, turned it up, and touched the Captain lightly at the heart. Puzzled, the Captain tried again. This time Talbot caught the blade high, deliberately waited for a second stroke, turned that stroke in such a manner that Captain Drake almost toppled off his feet, and again touched.

"You must teach me that," the Captain said slowly.

He was the perfect pupil. He tried hard, and was tireless and quite astoundingly strong. He seemed never to feel ridiculous, even with the whole crew watching. And Talbot knew that for all the awkwardness, here was a born fighter, a man who loved combat, and who despite his unsmiling countenance was truly thrilled when he faced another man with drawn steel.

It was Talbot who tired first.

"We must have many such lessons," the Captain said. "We will meet here every morning just after prayers, and again in the middle of every afternoon."

IN this way the teaching of swordsmanship came to be Talbot's chief pastime aboard the *Pascha*, for not only the Captain but also Joseph Drake, and John Oxenham and Ellis Hixom, frequently engaged with him. But the Captain was the most persistent. The Spanish tongue Captain Drake learned readily, but the rapier remained foreign to him. He seemed never to be entirely comfortable with one.

"You slash overmuch," Talbot told him repeatedly. "Use the point more, the edge less. When you draw back the blade for a cut, you're out of guard position, is it not so? Any good swordsman can pink you before that cut descends—aye, and be away from your measure when it *does* descend!"

"There might be much in what you say, Master Slanning. But in combat it

seems little satisfaction to stick steel into a man. It seems more natural to raise that steel and strike him with it."

"Natural? You should be controlled by your brain, Captain, not your feelings. You must not make any move which emotion suggests. Otherwise you would respond to every feint, and fall into every trap. Natural? Yes, perhaps the edge *is* more natural. But is the sword a natural weapon? Do the beasts of the field have swords?"

The Captain nodded, wiped sweat from his face, and went to his cabin—possibly, Talbot thought, to see whether he could find in the Bible any expression or preference for thrusting as opposed to cutting.

FOR all this, and with Robert sick most of the time despite good weather, Talbot found time dragging. He moped. He walked aimlessly around the decks, climbed ladders, vaulted coils of rope, sometimes even clambered up the mainmast shrouds for a baffled survey of the ocean. Because everything was so slow, the sea so monotonous, he began to think about himself—for the first time in many years.

Well, here he was, going he knew not where nor for what purpose. Intended for a country gentleman, he had gone journeying on the Continent, where he picked up some education and many expensive habits; and there his ambition was to become a great soldier, a great statesman perhaps. When he returned to England and learned that his father was dead and his fortune reduced to a handful of coins, he had through influential friends obtained a post in Sussex's household. And so he had found himself a swanking ruffler of the court, a youth who wore pearls in his ears and bowed from the hips and argued about the merits of his favorite perfume, a dandy ready to fight even for the lie seven times removed.

Marriage to Katherine Abergavenny would have changed this and made him steadier, less sensational. Probably he would have become, as her husband, a minor official, a fusser with state papers, an affixer of seals.

Then the discharge of a pistol in the hands of a drunken man—and here he was, sword-instructor for a group of desperate adventurers making for the other side of the world, while back in England half the law officers of the land were seeking him.

It was a great change, and he was not sure that he liked it. Hard riding he had known, and miserable inns, and many a fight, but never had he expected to know the stringent discipline of a ship, the dull dry food, the lack of all comforts to which he was accustomed.

What had he meant to be? He didn't know, really. Not *this*, though—a fugitive—a misfit!

From sheer boredom, and in an attempt to forget his own worries, Talbot began to take an interest in the way things were done aboard the *Pascha*. He talked with the crew. Some still regarded him with black suspicion and dislike, for Matt Coppledick had been popular; but most of them were glad to chat. Indeed Talbot's familiarity with them, and his friendliness, somewhat shocked Captain Drake.

For the Captain was scrupulously fair, comparatively gentle in the matter of punishments, but never democratic. In all his dealings with the crew there was evident a consciousness of his position. Moreover his cabin was sumptuously furnished, and his supply of clothes appeared to be without limit; for each morning he would appear in a different doublet, and he changed and experimented continuously with samite, sarsenet, taffeta, gold lace and silver lace, with boot hose and base hose and French short hose, and galligaskins and pantofoles, gamashes, slops, venetians.

IT amused Talbot to observe that while the Captain avoided any reference to the killing of Francis Monckton, preferring apparently to keep up the fiction that he did not know that his unexpected passengers were in any way connected with that event, still he was not able to keep from asking Talbot—oh, so casually!—if he had ever met that personage. And when Talbot confessed, with equal carelessness, that it had once been his privilege to meet Sir Francis, the Captain plied him with eager questions about the appearance of the favorite, and his dress, and his manner. Master Slanning had taken no particular note of Sir Francis' doublet? A pity! And the sleeves? Were they bishops or leg-o'-muttons? The Captain himself favored leg-o'-muttons, but he was anxious to know how the gentlemen of the court viewed this question.

A strange little man. Yet as the days wore on, Talbot came to be increasingly fond of him. He never smiled. He was

solemn at all times, yet not pompous. Most of all, he knew what he wanted.

Talbot's new interest in matters nautical pleased and flattered the Captain, who showed him how to handle an astrolabe and cross-staff, and how to check altitude findings with Johan Muller's tables of the sun's declination, and who discoursed enthusiastically though a bit confusingly upon topsails, clew-garnets, leach-lines, forebowlines, falls, and swifters.

"This is real," he would cry, stamping the deck. "This is no mere pile of boards! Heed ye, Slanning: You tell me that the edge is passing and that soon men will only fight with the point?"

"Aye. And he who knows this before most of his fellow-men—he will have an advantage over those who cling to broadsword strokes."

"Ah! Is not that the very thing I contend about ships?" The gray eyes were shining; the face was very red indeed. "You are a swordsman; I am a sailor, and I tell ye the ship itself should be the weapon—aye, and will be! Who has regard for a sailor, except when there are goods to be transported? Who considers him in wartime? When a fleet is equipped and sent forth, who commands but a soldier? Which are given precedence aboard, the soldiers or the sailing-men?"

"The soldiers, of course."

"Aye. And when that fleet meets the enemy, upon whom is reliance placed? The soldier again! And why? Because these military men know nothing about ships, and suppose that a battle at sea is to be conducted as nearly as possible like a battle on land. So they move this way and that, always with *land* tactics, expecting the seamen merely to obey orders like so many servants. They wish to get close and board. Hand-to-hand fighting—that they understand! But I tell ye that with enough cannon and powder, and with gunners who know their guns, and a real mariner commanding—a stand-off fight is better every time!"

"But the galleys! Think of Lepanto! Has not Giovanni Doria demonstrated for once and for all that—"

"The Mediterranean! I talk not of that puddle!" Francis Drake swept his arms in a circle. "Pour a hundred Mediterraneans into this ocean, Slanning, and there'd not be noticed even a rise of tide! And heed ye: On the other side of Darien there's an ocean I've heard is vaster than this one! That is

the Southern Sea, which has been named the Pacific." He lowered his voice. "I tell ye, Slanning, some day you and I will look out upon that sea. Aye, and sail it! For why should the Spaniards and Portuguese have it for themselves? Do they own the earth? Did God Almighty create this water for their only benefit?"

So they talked while resting between bouts; and these hours in the waist, fencing and talking, were the happiest Talbot spent aboard the *Pascha*. For it was then that he felt himself a useful part of the ship. At other times he was humbled by the clean efficiency, the sureness and confidence of the seamen; he was made to seem awkward, ignorant, unwanted. But in the waist it was different, for there he was himself superior; and besides, the exercises usually loosened the Captain's tongue.

"So you think like the others that galleys filled with soldiers, in whatsoever sea, can whip such lumbering vessels as this one, eh? Well, you've not seen it happen. A month ago I would have laughed at the man who told me that a fellow with only a splinter of steel, and not once using the edge, could make Francis Drake, the best sword-and-buckler fighter in Tavistock, look like a very housewife tripping over her broom. And still I cannot understand, quite, how 'tis done. I grant that you have greater knowledge of the sword, yet it never would have been possible for you to convince me by arguments whilst we were seated like this. Nay, I must see it happen! I must feel the prod fairly against my ribs! Then I believe that in truth you know whereof you talk, eh? Can you not understand that it is so too with ships?"

He rose.

"Will ye show me again, pray, that *guardia largha in sotto*? Surely with the right foot forward that leaves the breast unprotected? Should I have hap to advance my dagger just enough to—"

ON the twenty-third day, while Talbot was taking a siesta—a habit new but most naturally formed—they raised Dominica. It was oddly unexciting, Talbot thought when he came up on deck rubbing his eyes and yawning. Fabulous America? It was nothing more than a blurred, blue-gray thickening of the horizon.

They coasted until they discovered a small rocky island where there was a

spring, and there they remained for three days, stretching their legs, filling their casks, fishing. It was a bleak, hot place. "Not like Devonshire," Robert Butterwalk remarked.

IT was here Talbot had his first sight of the Spaniards of the New World.

A crank-sided carrack, obviously no fighter, and none too trimly rigged, approached them with confidence. Captain Drake would have permitted her to pass without hail, for he had no desire to have the Spaniards learn that he was in this part of the world, but she came on; she dropped anchor; she sent to the *Pascha* a small boat containing four oarsmen and a beplumed grandee. At four cable-lengths this boat stopped; the grandee looked doubtful; but Captain Drake roared in broken Spanish:

"Nay, since ye've come this far, come aboard!"

The grandee saw the cannon, and obeyed.

He was Don Alvarez de Ruidiaz, commanding the *San Antonio*, out of Cartagena for Seville, loaded with cochineal, cinnamon, a few arobas of small pearls, and many tons of water from a supposedly health-giving spring. This was not important—Captain Drake would not touch such trifles. What mattered was the fact that Don Alvarez instantly recognized the Englishman.

"Señor el Capitan Drake! El Draquel!"

They knew him, these Spaniards, and respected him, as Talbot was to learn. Don Alvarez, though supposing that he was about to lose both ship and cargo, protested that he was overwhelmed by the honor of meeting El Draque again. He meant it, too.

El Draque, the Spaniards called him: The Dragon.

These two commanders had a talk, with Talbot Slanning as interpreter; and Don Alvarez, when he learned that he would not be molested, gladly agreed to continue on his voyage to Seville—he was far out of his course—and not to put back to the New World with the warning that El Draque was again on the Main. After that Captain Drake breathed easier.

Nevertheless Captain Drake remained on deck for a long time that afternoon, watching the carrack get smaller and smaller, and Talbot heard him mutter: "Eh, and I hope that fine fellow didn't lie to me. We'll take no risk of it. Tomorrow we'll up anchors."

Their second landfall was at Sierra Nevada, behind Santa Marta. The Captain had discovered a secret harbor there the previous year, and had buried a supply of gunpowder and provisions. Port Pheasant he'd named it. It was a fine round bay between two high points, eight or ten cable-lengths across, but not more than half a cable-length at the mouth. A perfect hiding-place, with ten to twelve fathoms of water, a gently tilted beach, a jungle packed with fruits of all sorts, plenty of fish, plenty of game.

It was here that the Captain explained at last to his two brothers, to Talbot and Robert, Hixom and Oxenham, and to Tom Moone and a few others of the common sailors who were most trusted, where he meant to go and what he meant to do.

There was a map, a stiff yellow thing which the Captain took with great care from a sea-chest. He cleared his throat.

"We seek great treasure," he started abruptly. "Greater treasure than is contained in all England."

Imperiously he pointed to the map. He was an Alexander allotting satrapies to favored dependents.

"Twice each year two *flotas* set forth from Seville to fetch for King Philip the wealth his colonists have amassed. One is the *flota* of New Spain, the other is the *flota* of Tierra Firma. They sail together as far as Hispaniola, their landfall, and then one goes to San Juan de Ulua, the other to Cartagena, the capital of Tierra Firma. This second fleet, after loading at Cartagena, proceeds to a small city on the coast of Darien called Nombre de Dios. Mark Nombre de Dios well, gentlemen. It is there that this fleet picks up the treasures coasted up the shores of the Southern Sea from Peruana, where no white men but Spaniards ever have been, to the city of Panama, from whence it is carried by *recuas*, or mule-trains, across the isthmus to Nombre de Dios.

"Thereafter this *flota* proceeds up through the Yucatan Channel and makes contact with the *flota* of New Spain at Habana. Together they sail north through the New Bahamas Channel and thence east to the Azores and Seville. But they no longer go unguarded! The Indian Guard of twelve stout fighting galleons is their escort.

"However, there is a time before the Peruana treasure is loaded into these vessels—a few days when it is kept in

vaults at Nombre de Dios waiting for the arrival of the *flota* from Cartagena. For this isthmus of Panama is the bottleneck through which half the wealth of the world passes each year."

He rolled up the map, tied it with blue ribbons, replaced it in the sea-chest.

"We sack Nombre de Dios, gentlemen," he announced simply. "And now pray be about your tasks."

He was not asking their opinion: he was telling them his. He assumed that they would follow him blindly.

They sat stunned, aghast at the boldness of the plan. And as they sat there, hot in the hot little cabin, a call came from the lookout above:

"Sail, ho! Sail, ho!"

There was no scramble of excitement. The Captain looked for and found his brass telescope, and without haste went out on deck; and the others followed.

There were three vessels. One, by far the largest, loafed in the rear. It was a tall ship and somewhat resembled the *Pascha*. A shallop preceded it, and in front of the shallop was a small caravel. The smaller vessels were propelled by sweeps.

"The ship might be almost anything," the Captain mused, "but I'll wager my Negrolí burganet, that was give me by Sir William Wynter himself, that the two coasters are Spanish."

He turned to Robert Butterwalk.

"Ashore, please, and dispatch men to each of the points with word that the demi-culverins are to be fired if and when I loose a pennant from the out-rigger."

He turned to Talbot.

"Below, please, and tell Tom Moone to open all cannon ports and send up powder for each of the deck pieces. Have the sakers and fowlers brought here, with ball and powder, and the bases mounted starboard on the after-deck."

He raised his glass and continued to study the newcomers.

THEY came slowly, as though uncertain of what manner of reception awaited them. Once beyond the point, whether or not their commander knew it, they were trapped.

The shallop moved close, and somebody called: "Ahoy! Who be ye?" The voice was English.

"Captain Francis Drake with the *Pascha* and the *Swan*, out of Plymouth. Who's your admiral?"



The answer came: "Captain James Ranse in the *Griffen*, out of the Wight. And two Spanish prizes."

"A scamp," Drake muttered, half to himself. "I know him. A mere pirate. But we'll have to take him in on the venture or his presence may spoil everything." And he shouted: "Send Captain Ranse to me!"

While they waited for the shallop to take this message Captain Drake checked with his brother Joseph and with Hixom. The *Griffen*, it was learned, was a one-hundred-and-ten-ton vessel, formerly a Dutchman, now the property of Sir Edward Horsey, governor of the Isle of Wight. Ranse was an old Channel pirate who had sailed for various English owners, and also for the Huguenots and for the Dutch rebels. A skillful mariner, but a shifty, unreliable man.

"Three times while we were preparing he came to me with the suggestion that I make this same *Griffen* a part of my fleet, and himself second-in-command, but I refused."

Hixom said: "'Tis reported he has great influence over Horsey. Mayhap he persuaded him to permit this voyage after all."

"Likely. Small pirate pickings. Look ye at those two cockleshells that he's plucked."

Ranse was a tall dark man, of good breeding and some education, but given to a pose of roughness; he was a hand-shaker, a backslapper.

"Well met, Frank! When did ye sail out of Plymouth, eh? I quit the Wight on the 23rd of yestermoon. Twenty-seven days to Martinique! Such a wind I never did know! And a fine sailer I've got there. But what's about? I've forty-three stout fellows, ready and glad to slice a Spanish throat or two if the plan calls for such, as I'll warrant it does, eh? Tell me about it, and we'll throw together."

Captain Drake nodded a glum nod.

"I have a project, aye. Come to my cabin and I'll recite it. But I think 'twould be well to have here also your second and third in command, eh?"

"The one's mastering it aboard the shallop, the other's on the caravel. I'll

have 'em here in a scoop of moments." He leaned over the rail and gave orders to the men in the smallboat. Then he linked his arm with Captain Drake's. "Oho! That us two old seadogs should meet in this hole forsaken of God! Me-thinks that calls for wine, eh, Frank?"

"It might be well," Captain Drake suggested, "if we two fall on our knees first and give thanks to the Almighty for bringing us both here alive and in sound health."

The visitor looked startled, then he laughed.

"Aye, a right good proposal, Frank! But the wine first, eh? We'll wait the prayers till the others join us."

Nobody followed them. Nobody aboard the *Pascha* ever went into the Captain's cabin without his permission.

JOSEPH DRAKE and the other officers, like the Captain himself, seemed none too happy about the appearance of Ranse, whom they distrusted. But Robert Butterwalk and Talbot Slanning were elated, excited, thrilled at the thought of meeting fellow countrymen after having supposed, naturally enough, that except for the two ships' companies there were no other Englishmen within three thousand miles of this quiet bay.

The officers lingered at the head of the ladder, awaiting the arrival of Ranse's second and third in command: Joseph Drake was to receive them for his brother. But Talbot hurried back to his own quarters in order to don a clean ruff and to strap on his sword.

A few minutes later he hurried back on deck just in time to see Tom Gillard step off the ladder.

If Gillard felt an amazement comparable to Talbot's it did not show in his large dark face. He looked angry, sullen; but that was his usual appearance. His mouth did not fall open, nor was there any change in his purplish-blue eyes.

"Ah! Tom Radcliffe's messenger-boy again!"

Talbot would not have been so astounded if he were faced by a ghost. He stood motionless except for his right hand which had been engaged in fastening the belt-buckle and which still fumbled with that buckle absently, unthinkingly.

"Belting, messenger?" Tom Gillard asked. "Or unbelting?"

This could not be the deck of a ship in a tropic bay. This was not Darien,

this was Devonshire. This was the long room upstairs at the Three Crowns, Chagford.

"Unbelting, I make no doubt? 'Twould be safer."

The others were staring curiously at them, for though they were acquainted with Talbot's story, none of them had recognized Gillard, so none understood the strange behavior of these two. Robert Butterwalk was somewhere below.

Astonishment went out of Talbot, and anger poured in. The blood which had been pounding his temples seemed suddenly to leave his head, and his face went cold.

"Nay, belting!"

He snapped the buckle tongue into the last hole.

"Belting, so that we can finish our fight!"

He whipped out sword and dagger.

"Draw, sir!"

Gillard drew without the slightest hesitation.

This time neither man gave ground. Talbot was cut twice above the right ear, but they were glancing blows and at the time he did not even feel them. He sacrificed his head-guard to lunge full-length for Gillard's heart. Gillard stepped back with his left foot, and the thrust only ripped open his doublet.

Then somebody shouted from back by the Captain's cabin, and Tom Moone leaped forward and threw both mighty arms around Gillard's neck. At the same instant a loop of rope was thrown over Talbot's head, and he was jerked with a crash to the deck.

The fall stunned him. He struggled to rise, but now somebody was holding his arms.

Then the scene cleared for his eyes, and ceased to rock and whirl, and he saw Captain Drake standing there with Captain Ranse. Ranse looked excited, but Francis Drake was cold.

"I know not how you deal with brawlers," he told Ranse; "but for myself, I shackle 'em till they cool." He looked at Talbot as though he did not recognize him. To the men who held Talbot he said: "Put him in irons."

FOR five days Talbot Slanning remained in a dim room below-decks. He entered that room a fiery and thoughtless youth, but he emerged a man.

He was given plenty of food, and Tom Moone, his jailer, permitted him a short walk on the deck twice a day. There

were both leg-irons and wrist-irons in his prison, but even while he was being taken there, a sailor had come with word from the Captain revoking the order to use those irons: clearly that original order had been merely for show purposes, in front of Captain Ranse. Moreover Talbot was informed that he would be completely reinstated whenever he gave his promise to refrain from private fighting while this adventure endured.

"He says that afterward you can do whatsoever you desire about Ranse's lieutenant, but that whilst you're on Francis Drake's ship you must obey Francis Drake's commands."

"Tell Francis Drake," Talbot snarled, "that he's dealing with a man of gentle birth, not a sailor."

And Tom Moone shrugged and departed. He liked Master Slanning, but he worshiped Captain Francis Drake, and he thought Master Slanning was playing the fool.

IN this Tom Moone was correct—as Talbot himself came to realize. For Talbot was exercising a young man's privilege of being hot-headed and stubborn. This was being burned out of him all at once; and in the process his suffering, though sheerly mental, was acute.

He refused to take the daily exercise walk permitted him; he would not appear before the gaze of officers and men, a person to be stared at, snickered at. He knew the passing of time only by the sound of the ship's bells, and presently, because of sleep, he lost track of these, and did not know when it was night and when day.

Not many hours after he had been imprisoned he felt the *Pascha* move. Soon he could tell from the gentle roll that she was on the open sea again. He wondered if that meant that they were making for Nombre de Dios.

Twice each day Tom Moone recited: "The Captain's respects, and he wishes to know if you are ready to promise not to brawl whilst sailing in his ship?"

"My compliments to the Captain, and tell him to go to the devil!"

At first he was hot, then for some time cold, bitter. And then one day, unexpectedly, amazing even himself, he commenced to laugh.

Francis Drake was right, of course. Francis Drake always was right about matters nautical—and this was such a

matter, for all of Talbot's indignation. There was time to fight Gillard. There was other work to be done first.

The next time Tom Moone repeated his formula, Talbot rose.

"Take me to the Captain."

Nobody stared as he followed Tom across the deck. Even the crew tried to look as though nothing had happened. Nevertheless Talbot was blushing. This was a difficult thing to do, what he was going to do.

The Captain was genial, even solicitous. He poured Talbot a cup of canary, inquired concerning his health, was assured that he had been well treated.

"You were right," Talbot said, "and I was wrong. I'll not fight with Gillard while I serve under your command."

The Captain, embarrassed, waved a deprecating hand. They both gulped wine and sought another topic of conversation.

"Where are we?" Talbot asked. "We've been sailing."

The ship was motionless, riding at anchor off a cluster of fir-covered islands.

"These are the *Islas de Pinos*, about twenty-five leagues east of *Nombre de Dios*. The three ships and the caravel are to be left here, with Captain Ranse, and I will take the pinnaces and the shallop, for that they're smaller and faster. Captain Ranse and I have signed articles of partnership. He remains in charge of the rear-guard, but I will take twenty of his men, in command of Master Gillard, together with fifty-three of my own men. We sail in a few hours."

Talbot did not ask the question he was burning to ask. Notwithstanding Francis Drake answered it.

"I should like to have you go with us," he said.

"I shall be very happy to do so."

SOMEHOW they were better friends from that time on. They had previously trusted and respected one another, but now they seemed to understand one another as well.

The Captain finished his wine.

"There is another matter," he said slowly.

Talbot said nothing, but watched him.

"Here at *Islas de Pinos* we came upon two Maroons. Have ye heard of these same Maroons?"

Talbot shook his head.

"They were slaves, black slaves from Africa, but of a hardy fighting stock.

They escaped from the Spaniards and took to the hills, attacked some of the Indians and stole their women, and now are divided into powerful tribes who prey upon the colonists like wild beasts—and are treated as such when they're caught. They have been in the hills for eighty years, and they're a savage and warlike lot who hate Spaniards more than anything else on this earth. The Spaniards call them Cimarrones, or hill people.

"Now of these two we encountered here one is named Diego, a black who is known to me from a previous voyage and will serve me faithfully, for I saved him from a terrible death and these men do not easily forget. Diego talks some Spanish, and I myself have a smattering of the Maroon tongue, so that we understand each other. Diego tells me that the garrison at Nombre de Dios has been recently reinforced."

"They've learned that we have come!"

"Nay, they do not suspect our presence. The Maroons have been especially bold of late, and it is against them that they are preparing. The treasure fleet is there, the royal *recuas* have all come from Panama, and we must act quickly. This is as I knew it would be. But I did not know that the savages would cause such consternation at Nombre de Dios that the inhabitants there would construct a battery on the hill on the east side of the bay. Nor did I expect to find one hundred and fifty royal Spanish troops there from Panama."

The Captain turned his winecup around and around.

"Of course, this will not cause me to change my plans. I have not come this far to be turned aside by one hundred and fifty Spanish soldiers and a few brass cannon."

Diego would willingly risk a reconnoitering trip, but there would not be time for this. Moreover Diego would be recognized inside the walls of Nombre de Dios, where no Cimarrone was safe.

"Still I should like to know whether that battery has been placed and properly manned, and also where the reinforcements have been quartered. I should like to know whether the treasures brought by the *recuas* are stored in the Governor's house or in the Cabildo. If there were one of my own men there, to meet me when we launch the attack, and to give me this information—"

Talbot was on his feet.

"Could this Diego take one familiar with Spanish?"

"Understand me well," the Captain said, and he spoke slowly, carefully, looking hard at Talbot. "I do not command this—I do not even ask it."

"I will go!"

"We could land you near the mouth of the Rio Francisco and Diego could guide you to the city gates, which you could reach by Wednesday. Thursday morning, at dawn, the attack will be launched from the shore near the customs-house dock." He went to a cabinet, took out a steel morion, a set of back plates, a heavily ridged breast plate with a tapul in the Spanish style. "Your rapier and cinquedeas are from Madrid. Your face has been darkened by the sun, and you speak the Castilian tongue. Nombre de Dios, with the plate fleet in from Cartagena, will be crowded with strange mariners and gentlemen. Best of all, no one will dream that there's an Englishman on this side of the ocean."

"And some badge or cognisance?"

"Your shirt, wrapped and tied around your left arm. This only in the hour before we descend upon the city. Each one of us will wear his own shirt in the same way."

He came close to Talbot, touched Talbot's arm in an embarrassed gesture.

"Please believe me, I do not command this. It is a task fraught with uncertainty and danger. For if ye are captured, 'twill mean not merely death but a long and horrible torture, for that they'll wish to wring from you the reason for your presence there and also the story of how you came. They are experts in torture, those dogs of the Inquisition."

Talbot smiled. "You are thinking that if I told them, whilst screaming under the bite of their pincers, 'twould be a hot reception you'd meet, eh?"

"'Twould be the end of England's hope for empire," the Captain said solemnly, "for that each one of us would be hanged, and thereafter the Queen would permit no man to sail west."

"Where is this Diego?"

CHAPTER V

THE sunlight stunned. After so many hours of shadow (even in the daytime there was little enough light under those moss-hung trees) it hurt Talbot's eyes and caused his head to throb.

But indeed his whole body had been throbbing long before he reached the Panama Gate. He'd been scratched and cut, and his hose had been torn by creepers. His face and hands, bitten by insects, were swollen, red. Inside the body armor, under the ponderous morion, he sweated profusely. He had stumbled over twisted tree roots and splashed through black, reeking pools of swamp water, until his ankles and shins were bruised and sore.

A score of times he had been tempted to cry a halt to the huge muscular black, but he had resisted the temptation, struggling on. Diego seemed to have no exhaustion point. Nor did he ever appear to be in doubt as to the path they should take, though for all Talbot could observe they were going blindly through a trackless forest every part of which was as dim, as dank, as mysterious as the rest. But Diego had brought him here.

HE knelt by Talbot's side and with enormous but unexpectedly gentle hands brushed Talbot's hose. He brushed the sleeves of Talbot's doublet. Then he straightened, and stood dog-like, looking a question.

Still Talbot blinked in the sunlight. It was a positive, aggressive sunlight, white, harsh, unmercifully hurling itself upon every exposed object. Indeed the only thing which baffled this sunlight was the jungle itself, the jealous jungle guarding its own shadows and its wet sticky secrets. Against the jungle the sunlight fell away. It could not penetrate there.

Talbot became aware of Diego's question.

"You can go no farther? Yes, I am well enough now. And many thanks."

The black understood the tone, rather than the words themselves, for Talbot spoke a high Castilian which was almost as different as English from the bastard Spanish Diego knew. But he nodded, and disappeared.

He simply disappeared. He was there—and then he was not there, and not anywhere. Talbot was alone.

He shivered a little, for all the heat.

He pushed aside the fronds of a banana tree and stepped into the full glare of the sun. With such casualness as he was able to simulate, he strolled along an apologetic little path and came out upon the trail. It was a battered, frightened trail that scurried and twisted narrowly away in the direction of Pana-

ma. Talbot thought of the lanes of Devonshire, and he smiled. He was feeling stronger now.

Two muleteers glanced at him, and one of them touched a floppy straw hat.

Four impassive Indians filed past, each bending low under a great shapeless bundle. Behind them walked a man in a blue coat, who carried a whip.

The gates were open. A sentry was posted there, but he was little more than an ornament, and sat half asleep under an umbrella; flies hovered uncertainly around him, as though wondering whether it would be worth their while to light. The sentry didn't stir as Talbot entered *Nombre de Dios*.

It was a tiny, hot, flea-bitten place, and he very soon decided that the difficult part of his task would lie not in getting the information he had come to seek, but in keeping himself inconspicuous once he had done so. It was true that the plate fleet was in from Cartagena, and true too that *Nombre de Dios* was crowded with strangers; but most of these strangers were sailors who know one another by sight and in many cases were known to the townspeople. No doubt the residents mistook Talbot for an officer of one of the ships, while the sailors mistook him for a resident. He strolled about, trying to look supercilious, bored. He talked to no one, but learned what he wished to know by means of overheard conversations.

The riches from Peru had been stored in the Governor's house on the Plaza, and also in the *Cabildo*. Talbot was not able to learn how much was at one place, how much at the other; but it was easily seen that the Governor's house was the weaker of these two buildings. The reinforcements were quartered with the regular garrison in a long, low, wooden structure near the Panama Gate. The battery on the east hill had been completed but was not manned; two sentries were maintained there, each armed with a blunderbuss intended to serve less as a weapon of defense than as an instrument of warning in case of alarm. For the whole town buzzed with talk about the ferocious *Cimarrones*.

However, the *Cimarrones* were not expected to attack from any but the land side, for they lacked boats. The wall, therefore, was guarded at night, while the waterfront was not.

In a wineshop, where Talbot stopped for food and refreshment, he considered this situation. Given luck and a dark

night, a skillful mariner should be able to bring three pinnaces and a shallop around the west point and into the bay before these were seen. And even when they were seen it was unlikely that there would be an alarm, for they would resemble the small coasting vessels which ply between Nombre de Dios and Cartagena; in fact, the shallop was just such a vessel. Nobody here appeared to consider the possibility of an attack by Englishmen, though there were some murmurs about the Huguenot pirates. It was the Cimarrones who were most feared.

The chances for a surprise, then, were excellent.

THE reinforcements, as Diego had reported, numbered 150. The regular garrison consisted of eighty men, including officers. Fifteen professional soldiers invariably accompanied each royal *recua* from Panama, and since nine such *recuas* had entered the Atlantic port within the past week it was reasonable to assume that many of these soldiers still were quartered in Nombre de Dios. There had been a few private *recuas*, too, and surely these would be guarded at least as well as the royal *recuas*; for though the Cimarrones cared nothing for gold and pearls, they greatly enjoyed the sport of slaughtering Spaniards, and muleteers were refusing to make the trip unless they were provided with strong guards. In addition, many, probably most of the male citizens of Nombre de Dios were armed, and though disorganized could be counted upon to do what they could in defense of the city.

Francis Drake was to have seventy-three men, including himself. . . .

Talbot lingered in the wineshop. Not that he liked the place, but it seemed safe, and in it he was inconspicuous. It was the nearest thing to an inn that Nombre de Dios contained, and there were several private rooms upstairs, all rented now, and one large common room to which those who got too drunk were led or carried for sleep. This pleased the civic authorities, for it helped to keep the drunken sailors off the streets. It pleased the ships' officers, since they knew where to go when men were missing. And of course it pleased the proprietor of the wineshop, who could steal a coin or two upon occasion.

This public sleeping-chamber, Talbot estimated, would serve him tonight. For his greatest problem was how to

spend the time until dawn, when he should make his way to the beach near the customs house and receive his comrades. In the hot blaze of the afternoon he had been able to wander around the city without attracting undue attention, but as night came this would not be so easy. Stay in the city he must, for the gates were closed at sundown. He could not obtain a private room; so it would be safest, he thought, to pretend to drink too much and finally stagger upstairs and drop upon one of the blankets with which the floor of the common room was strewn. There he could pretend to sleep until the time came for him to sneak outside.

Nobody, least of all a Spanish wine-seller, would expect to find a man in body armor rubbing elbows with the waterfront riffraff. Still, though a gentleman, he reflected, certainly he resembled a down-at-heels gentleman. His hose was ripped and muddy, the sleeves of his doublet were torn, his cambric ruff and cuffs were dirty, limp. His face was red, not from wine but from mosquito bites—but it *was* red. He kept his chin sunk in his breast, and listened but didn't talk. He contemplated taking off the body armor; but he feared this would attract attention, for no true *caballero*, however low he'd been brought, would shed his breast- and back-plates in public. Surely no more cumbersome and uncomfortable articles of apparel, for men who lived in the tropics, ever had been devised. Yet because they savored of ancient chivalry, because they reminded of the congealed formalities of far Madrid and Seville, the Spaniards continued to wear them. Talbot twitched, sweating, but he remained encased in his steel. He wondered idly where Francis Drake had acquired this harness.

The place was filling now, and he no longer had a table to himself. A sly, rat-faced little fellow chattered pauselessly at his elbow.

"And my master, Señor, my gracious master, the illustrious Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia, hath engaged one of the private rooms, and dost know for what?"

Talbot hiccoughed, and took a drink of wine. The rat-faced man, seeming to suppose that this implied interest in his talk, answered his own question.

"He prays again to the blessed Virgin Mary, señor, for the strength to live un-

til he can arrange to have himself transferred to England in the suite of the King's ambassador."

Now Talbot observed that his companion wore a blue coat, and that on the left sleeve was sewn a cognisance: sable a fess wavy between two axes argent, undoubtedly was the arms of the illustrious Don Alvaro.

"And d'ye know why he wishes to go to England?"

Talbot hiccoughed, managed a nod. Evidently Rat-face was almost as drunk as he himself pretended to be.

"Why, for that he hath sworn a great vow that the heretic queen, Lisbet, shall be killed by his own hand. Eh, I tell thee my master's a pious man! For hath not this Lisbet willfully been quit of Mother Church, and hath not the Holy Father at Rome issued a bull of deposition against her? And so, my master thinks, that son of the Church who thrusts a dagger into her heart, him will the angels love."

Rat-face chuckled, and took a deep drink of wine.

Talbot felt cold. He staggered to his feet, turned in the direction of the stairway. He put a hand upon Rat-face's shoulder, as though to steady himself; but the servant mistook this for a friendly slap, and he rose, all eagerness.

"Wouldst ascend and have a peek at my illustrious master, señor?"

Talbot nodded.

"Aye, show me him."

IT was not because of any burning desire to see Don Alvaro Jesus that Talbot decided to go upstairs. It was rather because he wished to have a look at the common room.

The common room was on the right, at the end of the stairs. It was without candles, though a drizzle of starlight struggled between the bars at the window and fell to the dirty floor. Only two figures were stretched on that floor.

Rat-face opened a portal across the hall, peeked in, then beckoned Talbot. He had all the excited pride of a doting mother who displays to a guest her cradled sleeping child.

"He will pray like this all the night through, señor. He seems a weak man, except when he prays, and then he has the strength of great faith. He has taken the vow, and now he prays that he will be enabled to fulfill it."

Talbot peered through the partly opened door.



The illustrious Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia, from his clothes a minor grandee, poor but inexpressibly proud, was on his knees, his back to the hall door. He faced a brightly painted Madonna about twelve inches tall, flanked on either side by lighted candles. His head was low in humility, but his back was a ramrod. That back alone might have stamped him a Castilian; for it was eloquent of pride, of ancient and outworn but still cherished convictions of grandeur. They could not see the face; but the back of the head, and the back of the neck, were cruelly thin.

The man was mumbling. His voice seemed something different, something unreal and apart from him. The voice crept about the room like an eerie unsubstantial being from another world: it shuddered among the shadows, a restless malevolent spirit, agonized, unable to be still.

The sight was one Talbot never was able to run from his memory.

That sundry Spanish gentlemen had sworn to assassinate, or to arrange the assassination of Elizabeth of England, he knew as well as anybody else. In their minds it would be, as Rat-face had pointed out, at once an act of patriotism and a guarantee of eternal bliss after death. It would mean civil war, abolition of the Church of England, possibly union with Spain, and certainly an end to all the dreams of such men as Francis Drake. Talbot seemed to hear the little red-head spluttering as between fencing bouts: "They'd crowd us off the earth, an they were able! Aye, and they'll make the effort, unless we strike first!" But Talbot was thinking less of Francis Drake and his dreams of empire, than of the danger to the Queen herself. Somehow she seemed very real and near to him now, that hawk-faced woman with the black teeth. And she seemed immediately endangered. He had an impulse to shout a warning.

No doubt it was silly to feel this way, thousands of miles removed from the court—to take seriously the ravings of an obscure fanatic whose very face he had not seen. Yet the sight of that tense rigid back, and the sound of that

voice among the shadows, definitely alarmed Talbot.

Rat-face whispered: "Come, señor. The draft will blow out the candles." He closed the door gently, almost reverently. "He will remain on his knees like that all this night through. Ah, a great and pious man, my master!"

It had been in Talbot's mind to feign further inebriation and to throw himself upon one of the blankets in the common room. But now for two very human reasons he changed his mind.

He had been unsettled by the sight of the illustrious Don Alvaro, and he really felt a need for wine. Also he was reluctant to remain horizontal, in these hideously uncomfortable pieces of armor, and upon blankets probably verminous, for so many hours: it was now only ten o'clock.

So he went downstairs again, with Rat-Face prattling at his side. And he had scarcely taken a seat when he recognized one of the men at the next table.

He knew that he had seen the man before—knew this instantly—yet it was a long while before he could remember the occasion. A thin dry face, with a little white scar at the chin. Finally it came back to him.

Standing at the rail of the *Pascha*, watching Don Alvarez de Ruidiaz being rowed back to his own vessel for resumption of his voyage to Spain. *There* he had seen this face! It was the face of one of the four sailors in that boat. He had stared at the man deliberately, and the man had stared at him. Had the man recognized him tonight?

IT was a difficult thing to believe, yet Talbot was convinced of his identification. How could a sailor from Don Alvarez's carrack be in Nombre de Dios, now? The Spanish mariner, Talbot knew, had given Francis Drake his solemn promise that if he should hail any westbound ship he would not divulge the information that El Draque was on this side of the Atlantic. Drake had believed Don Alvarez to be a man of his word; and Drake rarely misread character. Besides, if Don Alvarez had broken his promise, and had returned to spread the alarm, then surely Nombre de Dios would be preparing against any possible incursion under the English captain. For men knew and respected El Draque over here.

The only explanation Talbot could find—he learned later that this was the

correct one—was that Don Alvarez had hailed a westbound ship soon after he sailed away from the *Pascha*, and had transferred a seaman who either was seriously ill or was showing symptoms of a serious contagious disease.

AGAIN Talbot glanced at the man. The man was gazing at him. Talbot looked away, and began talking rapidly to Rat-face.

But Don Alvarez's seaman, as Talbot learned by several cautious glances in that direction, still looked at him. The man wore a puzzled frown. He was trying to remember where he had seen Talbot's face.

Talbot rose, simulating drunkenness with such emphasis that even his chattering companion became aware of it. Talbot slapped the little fellow across the shoulders, and staggered for the stairs.

In the common room he divested himself of armor, doublet and shirt. He resumed the doublet and armor, and tucked the shirt under the breast plate from where he could tug it quickly. Then he stretched upon a blanket near the door. He would be safest there. The streets of Nombre de Dios would be almost deserted at this hour, and a solitary figure would attract attention. Don Alvarez's seaman *might* remember where he had seen that face; but this was unlikely. So Talbot consoled himself—until the seaman entered the room.

He walked directly to where Talbot lay, and held a candle close to Talbot's face.

Talbot was on his back. His eyes were closed, his mouth open, and he breathed regularly, heavily, with what he supposed to be a passable imitation of a drunkard's snore.

He heard a "Hm-m-m," and knew from the feeling against his eyelids that the candle had been taken away. After a while he ventured to open one eye. The room was empty except for himself and the two drunks in the corner. He loosened his cinquedeas and turned over on his stomach so that the seaman, if he returned, would not be vouchsafed another good look at his face. He had not fancied the sound of that "Hm-m-m!"

From across the hall he heard Don Alvaro's low toneless praying. He shivered at the memory of that unrelenting spine. This danger which threatened him downstairs was a material understandable thing which he could meet like a man; but what could anybody do

against the congregated might of such fanaticism as that of Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia? *That* was something courage and wit and rapier skill could not combat! Talbot rose quietly, stepped out into the hall.

The praying never halted. It irritated him, and frightened him too. He was trying to ignore it. For a more immediate peril faced him.

He crouched low, peering through the railing. Don Alvarez's seaman was near the street door, talking earnestly to a couple of soldiers. The soldiers nodded, dubious but interested. All three started toward the stairs.

A more immediate peril, yes. And the best way to meet it, he thought, was to go toward it. He started downstairs.

He stumbled. He lurched against the rail. He produced another successful hiccough.

THE proprietor approached him at the foot of the stairs, jabbering something about the price of the last two drinks. With an impatient gesture Talbot started to toss him a coin—but here one of the soldiers interfered.

The soldier pushed the proprietor aside. Somewhat frightened, yet firm, he took Talbot's right arm.

"If the señor will accompany us outside for a little walk, I think he will find that the night air—"

Talbot shoved him away, muttering something about being able to breathe night air without the aid of any dog of a guardsman. He was confident from the fellow's manner that the morion and body armor had impressed him, for all the ragged appearance of hose and doublet. On the word of a single seaman whose memory had possibly been befuddled by wine, Talbot believed, they were not likely to arrest one who might after all prove to be a *caballero* of some consequence. They only wished to question him with apparent casualness while he seemed drunk. They could assert, if there were trouble afterward, that they had merely been trying to help the gentleman.

But had the seaman's story convinced, after all? The soldier on the right was a persistent fellow. He took Talbot's arm again, this time with a firmer grip, while at the same moment the other soldier took Talbot's left arm. And the sailor from Don Alvarez's carrack, pointing at Talbot, shrieked: "'Tis the very same man! I swear it by all the saints!"

They started to push him toward the door.

The time for mummery had passed. Talbot stepped backward, twisting. His left arm came free, but for all the surprise this movement caused, the persistent soldier clung to the right arm. Talbot hit him in the mouth.

The man dropped Talbot's arm, putting both hands to his mouth, while his eyes became enormous. Before he could realize what had happened, Talbot had struck him again. The man stumbled back into a chair. "*Dios!*" he muttered. Then he sprang to his feet, drawing.

They all drew.

Talbot had jumped half across the room, but though he was able to reach the door, he did not dare to pause at the latch. He wheeled, sheathing his dagger, meeting the attack of the two soldiers with rapier alone. He thought he could hold them off for a few moments. He made no attempt to cut or thrust, but only parried with a wide flashing counter. Meanwhile his left hand fumbled with the latch behind him.

Somebody threw a stool, which struck him on the left leg. Then the door came open, and Talbot unhesitatingly sprang backward into the street. He didn't linger to make any gallant gesture. He ran.

Up one street, down another. Little crooked thoroughfares they were, and mercifully dark. There were shouts behind him, the sound of running feet, and somebody discharged a musket. Windows were being opened, curtains drawn, and men were calling questions.

Nombre de Dios was a tiny place, and Talbot had stored in his memory a good idea of its streets, but presently, in spite of this, he was lost. However, he knew that the ground sloped up from the waterfront and for this reason he ran generally uphill. The least he could do, he thought, was lead the chase away from the customs house.

HE rounded a dim corner, ran full tilt into four or five men with drawn swords. He lowered his head and dashed through. He was past them before they were able to turn in their tracks.

He burst into the Plaza—the center, the hub of Nombre de Dios. In front loomed the Governor's house, ghostly yellow in the starlight. Now, again, he knew just where he was. He ran around the Governor's house to the south, and

made for the Panama Gate. It was the farthest place from the customs house.

At no time did he really believe that he could escape. Howsoever fleet he might be, howsoever agile at dodging and twisting and doubling, inevitably they would run him to earth. For there were guarded walls on three sides of him and water on the fourth, and within this narrow compass the most inefficient searching force would soon be able to ferret out a fugitive. There was no place where he could hide for long. There was no place, he knew from his afternoon's inspection, where he could hope to scale the wall without being seen.

He stopped at the entrance of a dark alley. Before him, on the other side of a garbage-littered marketplace, was the Panama Gate. A soldier in the watchtower was leaning over the parapet calling questions. Another soldier, below, was whirling a torch around and around, striving to bring it to full flame. Gray figures were tumbling out of the long barracks. Somebody discharged a musket. Back in the Plaza a brazen alarm-bell was being tolled.

THERE were almost two hours left before the time for Francis Drake to appear. Within ten minutes, the way things were going now, the whole garrison would be swarming through the streets, the whole population would be awake and in arms. When that time came, he would surely be captured. Would it not be wisest to surrender? He could then, perhaps, convince the authorities that all the hubbub had been nothing more than the result of a drunken brawl. Or, if they did not believe this, what else could they get from him inside of two hours? Their more exquisite questioning would require time, for time is the very essence of good torture. And a violent, hurried examination might kill him—it would certainly not cause him to blurt Francis Drake's secret.

After all, it was his word against that of an excited sailor. And surely he could continue for some time his pretense at drunkenness; surely he could concoct some story which they would find it impossible to refute within two hours.

There was no possible way to warn off Captain Drake, even if that mariner would consent to being warned off when once he had made up his mind to do

something. The best Talbot could hope for was to lull the local suspicions, if only for a little while.

He would surrender.

He drew a deep breath. He staggered out of the alley and into the discouraged starlight of the marketplace. His chin was low, and he blubbered to himself, reeling.

An under-officer accosted him. What was the trouble? What was all the noise back there?

Surely this fellow would not suspect a lone drunkard of being the cause of the excitement. In a moment he would have pushed past Talbot. But now Talbot wished to be arrested as ardently as a few minutes earlier he had wished to avoid arrest. He stumbled against the under-officer.

He was shoved away with an impatient curse. Snarling, he struck the fellow in the nose.

A rapier flashed.

"Drunken churl! I'll teach thee to—"

The under-officer never quite knew what happened after that. His blade was thrown so high that he barely kept his grip on it, and his right shoulder was bitten twice by what seemed a lick of flame. He retreated, gasping.

But Talbot, instead of pushing on to an easy victory, spun on his heel and raced back into the shadows of the alley. For at the instant the under-officer drew, Talbot had heard from the direction of the customs house a shrill high whistle, followed by a spatter of musketry, and then—delightful sound!—the familiar bellow of Captain Francis Drake, carrying even over the babble of the town, over the housetops, across the Plaza, carrying clear to the Panama Gate.

"*Hal-lo, Slanning! Ahoy! Ahoy!*"

NOBODY moved to stop him now. Doubtless the pursuers who had been possessed of any clear idea of whom they were pursuing, had been thrown into bewilderment by the shouts in a foreign tongue issuing from another part of the town. Most of the residents, however, appeared to be suffering from the belief that *Nombre de Dios* was being attacked by the *Cimarrones*, and the clamor and confusion were frightful.

Talbot ran on, squirming, dodging. He was laughing too. Laughing at the thought that twice within a scant quarter-hour he had fled from sword fights. The first two times in his life. Assuredly this young court ruffler was cooling!

He avoided the Plaza, for he could see that most of the population was making instinctively for that center. Side streets and crooked little alleys led him at last to the slope which ended in Francis Drake.

"We were early, so I shouted you up! I'll explain later!"

Talbot yelled: "Only two sentries at the east battery! Six brass pieces! Eighteen-pounders and eleven-pounders!"

Men were scrambling out of the pinnaces, jumping to the dock, or else wading, splashing, while they held their weapons high. All of them had white scarves or white shirts tied around their left arms. Talbot remembered his shirt, yanked it out from under the breast plate.

"John! Oxenham! Gillard! Along the water street to the beach gate, and smash it! Up the hill! Toss those pieces off their mountings! Then back into the town and along the wall to the broad street leading to the Plaza! We rendezvous there!"

SOME of the men carried pikes, and some firepikes, a considerable number had longbows, and a few had partisans; but there were two dozen of muskets and calivers as well. A drummer and a trumpeter ran off with the party dispatched to the hill battery, making the noise of half a regiment. Another drummer and another trumpeter stayed with Captain Drake.

Hixom had already been told off, with six men, to guard the pinnacles and the shallop.

The rest of the invaders started up the slope toward the Plaza. The Captain himself led them, with Talbot by his side. The Captain was very gay in plum and scarlet silk, Sir William's burganet upon his head, a bright silver whistle swinging on a cord around his neck. He had his rapier in one fist, a dagger in the other; and he shouted without pause. Indeed, they all shouted; they wished to make as much noise as possible.

Talbot screamed into the Captain's ear: "Governor's house and Cabildo both, but Governor's house is weaker!" and the Captain nodded, without ever ceasing to shout.

Shuttered windows and doors greeted them on the way up the slope, but the Plaza itself was bright in the red glare of torches, and several hundred men were



drawn up in front of the Governor's house. The two front ranks consisted of soldiers, most of them with muskets raised. Somebody shrieked "*Fuego!*" And then it was as though the whole square had exploded.

The trumpeter whirled twice, started to run back toward the waterfront, and fell on his face. Two men dropped to their knees. Talbot felt the morion pushed down upon his forehead as though somebody had struck him with a club, but he was more immediately aware of the fact that Francis Drake lurched against him. He grabbed the Captain.

"You're hit!"

"Sh-sh! If the men hear it we're lost! They're panicky!"

He raised his voice to a shout again, and charged across the square, brandishing his rapier. Gun-smoke swirled regretfully behind him. He limped the least bit on his right leg, but only Talbot noticed this. Talbot, close behind, yelled for him to keep his point in line.

"How d'ye hope to parry when—"

"I'm not parrying tonight! I'm *cutting!*"

It seemed to Talbot, for a moment, that only these two had charged. They were surrounded, and his own rapier was kept so busy that he had no chance to scold the Captain again. He ran one man through, chased away two others. Something thudded against his back and bore him to the pavement, but he sprang to his feet again, slashing. There was so much noise around him that it seemed to be no noise at all. There in the wild red torchlight he had the feeling that he was fighting in an utter silence, in a very fog of stillness, fighting phantoms with a phantom sword.

And then, abruptly, he wasn't fighting at all, but running here and there to carry out the commands of the Captain. From a street on the east side of the Plaza the other half of the invading force had appeared, shouting and singing, with drum and trumpet; and the Spaniards, who in fact outnumbered their foes five to one but who could not be expected to know this, broke and ran.

"The ram! The ram!"

A fourteen-foot tree-trunk, into the sides of which iron pins had been driven, had been hauled into the Plaza. So swiftly had the fighting there been finished that the men who bore the trunk had not been given a chance to catch up with their fellows until this moment. Now a dozen others sprang to the thing, and soon it was thumping regularly against the west door of the Governor's house, which Talbot had already selected as the weakest. John Drake was posting pickets at the head of each street leading into the Plaza. Talbot, tearing the shirt off his left arm, crowded the Captain into a dark doorway.

"I tell thee the men—"

"The men will have no leader at all an this wound's not staunched," Talbot snapped. "Hold still a moment!"

It was secretly done, as though it were a shameful deed. The wound was high, near the groin, and Talbot bound it with merciless pressure, tugging with all his strength; afterward he covered much of the white shirt with the Captain's trunk-hose. The Captain was too excited, too wildly impatient, to feel any pain. He himself did not realize the seriousness of the wound, though it is doubtful that he would have acted differently if he had. His feet shuffled, and his eyes moved back and forth, watching everything in the turbulent square, while Talbot banded the leg. The instant this was finished he shot away like a stone released from a siege machine.

"Take care you run not too hard!"

But the Captain did not heed. Talbot ran after him.

WHILE Talbot was not Drake's keeper, he knew the Captain's wound was a bad one, and that the Captain might collapse at any moment. A terrible moment that would be, too. For the men, as the Captain had said, were frightened. Talbot did not know then, but he was to learn later, that it was this fright, this nervousness in anticipation of an experience which would be new to them—for they were sailors, not soldiers, and sailors, as Francis Drake had complained, were not trained to fight—which had caused the early arrival.

Something like panic had come over the men while they waited around the nearest point of land for the first faint flush of dawn. They had whispered that this *Nombre de Dios* was in fact a city as big as Plymouth, and that twenty times their number could not expect to take

it by assault. The story the captured Cimarrones had told, about reinforcements from Panama, was whispered among them. One thousand troops, they said. It would be a fiasco, it would be a horrible, senseless slaughter. And the Captain, for all his prestige unable to stop or lull the fire of fright, had refused to wait until dawn. He had taken advantage of the fact that the moon was trying to push itself through clouds on the horizon, and had boldly proclaimed that *this* was dawn. And so he had ordered the attack, two hours early.

NOW the men were apprehensive of a counter-attack. Their ears rang still with the shattering crash of that one and only Spanish volley.

"Stouter on that ram, boys! *Swing!*"

The door, splintered, shrieked like a living creature in pain. The Captain squirmed and wriggled through the aperture. Talbot, snatching a torch, followed him.

Talbot shouted: "The cellars!"

The cellars, or cellar, for it was all one room, was enormous. There was only one door, and Talbot and the Captain were able to batter that down almost before Oxenham, Tom Gillard and three of Ranse's men came scurrying after them.

Two of Ranse's men carried torches, and these, with the torch Talbot carried, showed them silver.

Pure silver! More of it than most of them had supposed existed in all the world. It was a mountain made of silver bars neatly criss-crossed, each bar touching each of its fellows. A mountain. No, rather it was like a great silver house, though it was solid, not hollow. It extended almost the full length of the cellar, which was at least seventy-five feet, for the Governor's house occupied all one side of the Plaza. It was perhaps twelve feet wide, about ten feet high. The great wall shone almost white, almost luminous, as though there were a strong light behind it. It did not shimmer, even in the jerky glare of torches, but shone with bland unwinning magnificence, with splendor serene and tranquil.

They stepped back, jerking in their breaths—all except the Captain, who went without hesitation to one corner of this house and because the top was too high for him to reach started striking a corner with the heels of his hands. He dislodged a bar, creating a landslide of

silver; he sprang back scarcely in time to save his feet from being crushed. Calmly he picked up one bar.

"Thirty-five or forty pounds," he said, as though to himself. He dropped the bar and started for the door.

"I'll summon the men—" said Gillard.

The Captain cried: "Wait!"

Gillard paused.

"This is not what we wish. We came for gold, not silver. Leave it. We'll make for the Cabildo."

"By God, man! Have you gone mad?"

The Captain's eyes were icy, his mouth tight.

"Nay, I'm sane enough, Master Gillard. There's full three hundred and fifty tons of metal here. Even if we could hold the town long enough to cart it to the boats, 'twould sink them. We'll take none of it. We came for gold."

Gillard yelled: "Angels of grace! A million pounds sterling, and you'd walk away from it as though it were a pile of horse manure!"

"I'll not walk away from it—I'll run away! Come!"

"Nay, I'll remain here! I'm no madman!"

"Please yourself, Master Gillard. But methinks you are a madman surely, if you stay. For you'll stay alone. And if ever you get to the water again you'll find no boats!"

Gillard went out.

THE Cabildo, which contained the treasury vaults, was not far distant. Already orders against looting had been issued, but now Captain Drake made particularly sure that none of the men would enter the Governor's house and see that silver. He ran after the battering-ram to the Cabildo, with Talbot, at his heels, watching him anxiously, marveling that the man was able to keep consciousness, much less to dash about giving orders.

"Here," cried Captain Drake, "we'll find gold!"

But as the ram started its thumping against the door, the Captain leaned against a pillar. It was a shadowed spot. Talbot took his arm.

"Thou'rt fainting?"

The Captain's face gleamed with sweat and there was agony in his eyes. The first flush of excitement past, he was feeling the pain of his wound.

"Nay, I'll last it. When they see the gold they'll forget about their commander, anyway."

The real dawn was coming and the sky was a sickish gray. Nombre de Dios was filled with little groups of men scurrying here and there, peering around corners, creeping with caution from doorway to doorway. Now and then a musket would be discharged, and there would be some yells, a scampering of feet. Then silence again—except for the monotonous thumping of the ram, which resounded throughout the entire city.

FEARING a counter-attack and knowing that they were greatly outnumbered, the Englishmen were nervous. The Spanish soldiers were just as nervous, for they had no knowledge of the size of the invading force; they were scattered, and their ranks were crowded and confused by surging groups of citizens, some of whom still wailed that the Cimarrones had captured the city and were about to put all the inhabitants to a horrible death. The Spanish soldiers, however, would welcome full daylight, while this was what the English feared most.

"To the Plaza, Talbot, and tell my brother John to defend that place at all costs. Then seek ye Tom Gillard and instruct him to march his men down to the customs house and make sure that all's well with the boats. Afterward Master Gillard shall come to me here."

"Thou—thou'rt all right, Frank?"

"I am all right. I'll keep leaning against this post."

The rain came without warning. It was not drops merely, but sheets. It hurled itself furiously upon the rooftops, upon the streets, upon every exposed thing, fuming, stinging, hissing a song of hate. And thunder boomed and crashed.

Talbot, first making certain that Tom Moone was acquainted with his master's condition, and cautioning Tom to keep this information from the rest of the men, dashed for the Plaza.

The houses of Nombre de Dios, and in particular buildings fronting on the main street up which Talbot ran, all offered considerable shelter from the rain. There were wide verandas, deep doorways, numerous arcades. Talbot, however, ignored these. He kept to the middle of the street. The rain threw itself against him as though in an effort to knock him over; it splattered and splashed off his morion, and seeped through the cloth of his sleeves and of his hose, and it slithered underneath the back and breast plates. The street it-

self, dry a few short minutes before, had become a raging sea. Brown water swished and splashed in a thousand torrents on its way down toward the docks. Great brown pools lay shuddering under the impact, their surfaces a frothy blur. Rain was lashed and whipped against the sides of houses, splitting into billions of tiny drops, into a haze that was almost like fog.

Forty men, more than half the force, had been assigned to guard the Plaza, but only a few of these were in sight when Talbot reached the top of the slope. The rest were standing under cover keeping their weapons dry—for most of the matchlocks and firepikes were here. John Drake and a few others tramped back and forth, closely watching the streets which led to the back of the city, where most of the Spaniards were congregated. John Drake roared continuously; but whether he was roaring for sheer excitement, or whether he was trying to sing, nobody knew.

"Aye, we'll hold it, an we're not drowned first!"

"You should see it below," Talbot told him. "Half this water's sluicing down there. Where's Gillard?"

"Gone with four men out to the east wall, to make sure there's no flanking. All in high chafe, too, for that he's obliged to take orders from me. Why didn't you skewer that scoundrel, Slanning, when you had the chance?"

Talbot grinned. "I'll have him yet," he promised.

"He stamped about like a Tom-o'-Bedlam when first he came out of the Governor's house. Tell me, what did ye find in there, eh? Frank was too busy to give me that information."

"Silver."

"Much silver?"

"About three hundred and sixty tons. Tom Gillard was all for toting some of it away, but the Captain swore 'twas not worth the effort to go off staggering under such cheap metal."

JOHN DRAKE dashed his cabasset to the mud and threw his head back, roaring with delight while the rain-water streamed down his face.

"Ho, Frank! Frank! Was ever there a man like that brother of mine?"

"He said he'd come for gold, and gold he'd get."

"And he will too, Slanning! Mark ye my word, he will! He'll be the richest man in England—or else the deadest one

in America!" A fresh spasm shook him. "And Slanning, imagine how bedecked he'll be with gauds and finery if ever he *does* get that gold! On my conscience, the Queen's Majesty herself will be like a drab at the side of him!"

Talbot left him and made along the street leading to the east wall.

NOW it was past the hour of dawn, but the sun was hidden behind thunder-clouds, and unceasing rain kept the city in sullen darkness. Near the wall Talbot saw ahead a group of four or five men who crouched in the shelter of a porch. He jumped behind an arcade pillar. They might be Gillard's men—or they might be Spaniards edging their way around to the Plaza as scouts in advance of a larger force. To Talbot they were only vague forms, darker blurs in the dark street. He hoped for a flash of lightning, but none came. It was a shout from the group which reassured him. They had seen him.

"Hi! What make ye there?"

It was Tom Gillard's voice. Talbot without hesitation stepped from behind the pillar.

"Orders from Captain Drake that—"

There was a flare of orange light, an explosion. Something clanged against Talbot's breast plate with such force that he was pushed over backward and sat in the mud with an angry splash. Startled, he felt the left side of the breast plate; it had been grooved, but was not torn; its curved steel had spared him a bullet in the heart. He was not hurt, but when his astonishment had passed he was white with rage.

"Ye blundering churls! Know ye not that I come from Captain Drake? Did I not call out—"

Tom Gillard, who held a smoking pistol, smiled at him in mock astonishment.

"In this wind, in this rain, who could say whether a shout's in English or Spanish? You might have been a soldier who'd climbed the roofs from a back street."

Talbot was so angry that he scarcely could catch his breath. His right hand was on the hilt of his rapier.

"The command was," Tom Gillard drawled, "that each one of us should wear something white upon his left arm. I see none such upon yours."

It was true that Talbot's left arm was not marked now, for the shirt had been used to bandage Francis Drake's leg. It was also true that Gillard had not mis-

taken him for a Spaniard but had seen an opportunity to kill him and unhesitatingly had accepted it. Yet Gillard was sure of himself. Slaughterous intent couldn't be proved against him. His expression told Talbot all that Talbot needed to know; but you can't put a man's expression into your purse, and produce it later as evidence before an impartial judge: you can't establish a man as a criminal on so slight a thing as the glint in his eyes, or the lift at the corners of his mouth. Talbot's whole body, all his muscles and his nerves, implored him to draw and have at this taunting giant. His temples throbbed, his hands twitched; there was a weird moaning in his head.

Tom Gillard continued to smile. It was a smile that dared Talbot to draw.

Talbot caught his breath in full, and held it like a diver. He exhaled suddenly, noisily, and then inhaled again. He took his hand from the sword-hilt.

In a low, harsh voice he gave the Captain's orders.

Gillard actually bowed. "We will do what the commander says, of course. Ho, boys. Follow me!"

ABRUPTLY the thunderstorm ceased, as though at a signal—no rain fell, where a moment earlier there had been torrents; and an impatient sun, vexed at the delay, commenced to shove columns of light down upon *Nombre de Dios*.

Light, day, would mean the end of the attack. When their weakness was exposed, the English could only retreat.

Talbot walked slowly back to the Plaza. John Drake had chased his men out of shelter, and already muskets were banging in crooked little streets in the direction of the Panama Gate. Even so, there was audible always the steady pounding of the ram at the Cabildo.

"In the name of God, tell Frank to hasten," John Drake called. "They'll rush us at any moment now, and we're not strong enough to resist them more than once! My men are affrighted!"

Even as Talbot was quitting the Plaza, there came an increased spatter of shots and the whoops of charging Spaniards. Some of the sailors broke and ran for the waterfront. Three of them passed Talbot. "Back, ye cowardly dogs!" There were tears in his eyes for the rage that shook him, and he tried to whack the men's legs with the flat of his sword, but they dodged away, racing for the pin-naces, yelling in alarm.

The pounding of the ram had ceased. Talbot found that instrument on the Cabildo veranda, and the men who had manned it wavering in fear. The door of the Cabildo had resisted all their efforts, for this was a much stouter building than the Governor's house, where but the overflow of riches had been stored. Francis Drake's face was red, and he waved his arms.

"I bring ye to the treasure-house of the world, and ye would sneak away like whipped mongrels!"

Terrified men raced past from the direction of the Plaza, yelling, screaming. But the men assigned to the battering ram were held back by the sheer force of their captain's anger: they were more afraid of the look in his eyes than of the Spanish muskets, and they stood still.

"I bring ye within a few feet of the heaped-up riches of all the Americas, and ye would—"

He stepped away from the pillar against which he'd been leaning. Talbot sprang forward to support him, but it was too late. Francis Drake fell unconscious upon his face in the mud. The bandage had slipped, and blood gushed eagerly from the wound.

The men ran, howling in terror. There were only Tom Moone and Talbot left, and the still figure of Francis Drake.

"After them! Make them hold the boats!"

"But he—"

"I'll carry him down! *Make them hold those boats!*"

Tom Moone turned and ran down the slope.

Talbot threw himself upon his knees beside the Captain, tore the whistle from the cord around his neck, clapped it into his mouth, and as he tightened the bandage again, he blew repeatedly: *One-two-three! One-two-three!* It was the retreat signal.



CHAPTER VI

TOM GILLARD had finished his report.

"And if there's naught else you wish me for I'll go out on deck and see young Master Butterwalk, who has been look-

ing despondent as any new-made widow these days. Mayhap I can cheer his gloomy soul."

Francis Drake was curt.

"There's naught else."

THEN Talbot reported. All this was for the benefit of a glowering Ranse, who no longer made any pretense of good-fellowship.

Talbot said nothing about the reason for his dented breastplate. It would be impossible to prove an attempt at murder, and he did not care to give Tom Gillard the satisfaction of winning acquittal.

"One thing further," the Captain said. "In your opinion, Master Slanning—for you saw the stuff—in your opinion, how much of it could we have moved?"

Talbot shrugged.

"Mayhap a ton, or even two tons."

"Two tons!" Captain Ranse could contain himself no longer. They were alone in the cabin now, and Ranse stalked back and forth, waving his arms, working his thick black eyebrows up and down. "Two tons of pure silver, worth four or five thousand pounds of the Queen's good money, and ye treat it like dirt!"

Captain Drake, in his bunk, essayed a shrug.

"You would snatch a few thousand pounds and be happy, Captain. But I came here for millions. And I," he reminded, "am commander of this expedition."

"No longer! Our articles of partnership covered and included this one adventure only!"

"True."

"And we are not partners now! I've had overmuch of this big talk! I sail for England today!"

"I regret to hear that," Francis Drake lied.

"At least I have the shallop and a caravel, and my share of the wine."

They had seized a vessel laden with wine in the harbor of Nombre de Dios. With the corpse of the trumpeter, numerous wounds, a few bad memories, and many bitter feelings, it comprised their only loot.

"And you? You remain here?"

"Aye."

"How long?"

"Until I get what I came for."

"You're a fool, Drake. I go back to England."

"God be with you," said the Captain.

Glowering, Ranse went out, and as the door slammed shut behind him, Captain Drake glanced at Talbot.

"Did I not say he was a vulture?"

"He'll tell some cock-and-bull story at home, and have it that all the blame is thine."

"No doubt. I expect them to be calling us pirates when we return, Talbot."

"I wonder what Gillard will do?"

"Spread lies about you and Butterwalk, as Ranse will spread them about me. But soon you will have the same answer. Men who show one thousand per centum profit on an investment are not murderers, any more than they are pirates. Gillard has relatives, and some wealth of his own. Ranse will put him down on the Continent, or mayhap he'll brazen it out by asserting that the news of Monckton's death had not reached the Wight when he sailed. With the right connections, even Gillard could buy his way free—though it'd ruin him. For there's always dirty work to be done in Ireland for which the Queen's Majesty has no burning desire to pay in cash. Gillard will turn patriot, forsooth. But thou'lt not be obliged to behave in that manner, Talbot. Nor will Master Butterwalk."

"Poor Robin! I fear his conscience will torture him always. There was a time when I was affrighted that he'd lose his reason, though methinks he's looking up a bit of late."

"Aye, we'll pump cheer back into him somehow. For there'll be your word and Master Butterwalk's against the word of Gillard as to what happened in that room in the Three Crowns. I'll work as hard for the clearance of his name as for thine own, Talbot. And this I'd do, aye, even if thou hadst not saved my life in the action just past."

This embarrassed them. The Captain, whose face remained bright red for all the blood he had lost, turned his head away and affected a great interest in the ceiling.

"But if the plate-fleet's gone—"

"There is a plate-fleet every six months," Francis Drake reminded him. "We missed one. We'll take the next."

"We remain here, then?"

"Aye. We'll cruise a few months, garnering such prizes as fall our way—there should be plenty between Cartagena and Nombre de Dios—and then one day we'll disappear into Port Pheasant or some like place, and the Spaniards will suppose we've made for home, satisfied with

small pickings, even as Ranse is making for home this very day. We'll stock up well, and we'll not venture out until the next treasure has been brought up from Peruana. We'll not attack Nombre de Dios again, for that city will be better garrisoned and fortified now. Panama, at the other end of the bottle-neck, is too strong for the force we have. But it should be possible to fall upon the *recuas* as they emerge from Panama."

"Cross the isthmus!"

"Why not?"

Talbot was laughing, thrilled at the audacious simplicity of this plan.

"For they will not expect us at Panama," Francis Drake pointed out.

"Oh, certainly they will not!"

"Also 'twill give us a sight of that great Southern Sea concerning which we have heard. No Englishman ever has looked upon that ocean, Talbot. And methinks—"

A SHOT rang out; it seemed to shake the whole ship; for it was the hour of the siesta, and the *Pascha*, at anchor off the *Islas de Pinos*, had been wrapped in a warm hush.

The Captain whispered: "Close by herel And aboard!" He could not himself move because of his wound.

Talbot ran out on deck. Captain Ranse was at the rail, about to step down the ladder which would take him to a smallboat. Tom Gillard stood near the after cabins, with one of the *Pascha's* seamen just behind him.

"Inside somewhere," Gillard called.

Two cabins opened upon the waist. Between their doors a narrow passage-way led into the after superstructure, and there were four additional cabins there, two on each side. Talbot pushed past Gillard and into the corridor. He shook the seaman.

"Whence came the shot, Turner? From what cabin?" he demanded.

Dick Turner's face was white and his hand trembled as he pointed to the cabin Talbot himself shared with Robert Butterwalk.

Sharp stinging smoke swam out when Talbot opened the door.

"Robin! Robin!"

But Robert was dead—the whole right side of his head was black with powder, and there was a round blue-black hole in the temple. In his right hand, smoke curling from its muzzle, was the same pistol which had caused the death of Sir Francis Monckton. . . .

They roamed the seas, taking such prizes as came easily. At Cartagena they captured a couple of fregatas, landed, drove off a party of musketeers, and returned in modest triumph to their own vessels. The men, this time, stood up well under fire. The Captain had been confident that they would do so. "Men must be *taught* how to fight," he explained to Talbot.

They established a base at Port Pheasant and stayed there a fortnight, cleaning the ships, shooting at archery butts, pitching quoits. It was a little paradise, and so too was the headquarters they established afterward near the mouth of a river they named in honor of the faithful Diego, who had returned to them.

An oversupply of vessels was their only worry. They did not have enough sailors to man them. The *Swan* they scuttled, and later the *Pascha*, and they burned several smaller ones.

Talbot told Francis Drake about the vow taken by Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia, but the Captain did not seem alarmed.

"I make no doubt many an enemy has sworn that self-same vow."

"If ever thou hadst seen this Don Alvaro—"

"Thou thyself saw only his back. Canst estimate a man's capacity for being dangerous by sight of his back, eh?"

"If thou hadst seen him, thou'dst understand," Talbot said.

He did not mention the matter again. . . .

The Captain was walking his own deck within a week of the action at Nombre de Dios, and within another week he did not even show a limp, and was suggesting to Talbot that they resume rapier practice. He was as red as ever, as solemn, as sternly just in everything.

HIS brothers did not fare so well. John Drake was urged into a unwise attack upon a Spanish coasting vessel while Francis Drake was cruising the Main in search of provision ships—and had most of his intestines blown away. He died within the hour. Joseph Drake was one of the first victims of the plague which descended upon their hitherto idyllic establishment on the Rio Diego. That plague cut into their force with far more telling effect than ever the Spaniards did. Men turned black, shrieking in delirium, and died.

They raided Tolon, and they took a few more ships with provisions; and at

last word was brought from out of the jungle that the plate-fleet had reached Nombre de Dios from Cartagena. The Spaniards would be moving the treasure now. There was no time to be lost.

On Shrove Tuesday, February 3, 1573, eighteen white men joined Pedro, the Maroon chief, and thirty of his followers; and for seven days they stumbled and tore through the jungle, up the Cordilleras, until they reached a peak where there was a towering redwood into the trunk of which steps had been cut. Talbot and the Captain and a few others climbed this tree.

FAR away, faintly silver-white, clean and dainty, was that body of water which the Spaniards called the Pacific Ocean. The Englishmen gazed upon it for a long while.

Nobody said a word while they descended. Then it was that the Captain broke silence in a manner characteristic of him. He suggested that they kneel in prayer and ask the Creator for strength to live until the day when an English ship should sail that far, fabled sea.

"Wilt captain that ship, Frank?" asked Talbot, after they'd risen.

"Aye, if the Lord wills it."

"But how to get there? Surely no man could carry even a small pinnacle in sections across this isthmus?"

"The Spaniards build coasting vessels at Panama and Lima, and keep them in that ocean. We could not do that, of course. But there are the straits far to the south."

"Only one ship hath sailed through those straits and returned to Christendom," Talbot reminded him—for such was common belief.

"There must some day be a second." The Captain's voice took on an edge of excitement. "Think of the riches! Here on the Main there has been some defence preparation, for that the Huguenots have been hereabouts, and my uncle Master Hawkins, and also myself. But along the coast of this Southern Sea there will be none to expect aught but Spanish ships. Town by town we could take, and ship after ship! Why, we could sack a whole continent before ever the news reached Panama!"

Talbot asked quietly: "How could we get back?"

"Aye. . . . They'd block the straits against us."

"The world is round."

Drake's head snapped up.

"Art proposing that we follow in the path of Magellan, eh? Art proposing that we circumnavigate the globe, without charts, without maps?"

"Thine own words, Frank: 'There must some day be a second.'"

"H-m-m—" said Francis Drake; and he was silent for a long time after that.

Two days later they reached the pampas and no longer enjoyed the shelter of the jungle. Three days after that, they were within sight of Panama—and incidentally within sight again of the Pacific. They crouched at night in the tall grasses on either side of the trail. They had every reason to believe that the wealth of the New World was to fall into their hands at last. And their hearts beat faster when they heard the faint far-away tinkle of the bells around the necks of mules. The sound came closer. Not one but many *recuas* were approaching, evidently.

Again a small thing brought them defeat. A too-eager sailor sprang to his feet and shouted something, for sheer excitement. A horseman who had been riding ahead of the *recuas* turned promptly and spurred back to the city, firing his fowling-piece. The alarm was given. Hope of surprise was gone.

They marched to Vera Cruz, stormed it, drove out the Spaniards, and held the town for an hour and a half, finding nothing worth taking. Then, hearing that a relieving force was on the way from Panama, they slipped away.

There was no further hope of intercepting Spanish treasure. There was nothing to do but return to the Atlantic coast, and to their ships. The trip back was a terrible one. Man after man fell dead by the way. Provisions were low; the trail was rough; the heat maddening. But eventually they rejoined Ellis Hixom and his rearguard. Of the seventy-three who had sailed out of Plymouth, thirty-one were left.

"We remain here," said Captain Francis Drake. "There will be another shipment of treasure in six months."

CHAPTER VII

ONCE again Talbot found himself close to the Panama Gate at Nombre de Dios. But he was on the outside of the gate now, standing behind a moss-clogged oak; and concealed about him were thirteen other Englishmen, a few Maroons, and twenty Huguenots under

Captain Têtu. A stout fellow, this Têtu, and not one of Ranse's sort. They had fallen in with him at Cattivas, where he was in dire want of water and victuals. He swore he had been searching for Francis Drake these five weeks past. He was Drake's man. What did Drake wish to do?

Why, Captain Drake had a plan. He believed that the last place in all America where the Spaniards would expect an attack was the gates of Nombre de Dios. For that city, since the original attack, had been heavily fortified. Captain Drake, however, proposed to halt a few *recuas* at its back door; and this was why they waited now just outside of the Panama Gate, so close to Nombre de Dios that they could hear all the night through the hammering of carpenters at work refitting the plate-fleet.

Three *recuas* came, and one had fifty mules and each of the others had seventy mules. There were guards—oh, of course! But it had been well arranged, and the English sailors were now accustomed to fighting. . . .

"*Nom d'un petit nom,*" whispered Captain Têtu; and he sat down. It was finished very quickly. Têtu was dying, yes. . . . And Dick Turner was dying; and sundry Spaniards, too, were either dead or very close to death; but on the whole, it was easily brought off. And the Captain was blowing the whistle: *One-two-three! One-two-three!*

SLOWLY, for they were heavily laden, they started back for the Rio Francisco. "*Nom d'un petit nom,*" muttered Captain Têtu. "Leave me here to die." It was a pity that they could do nothing else but that. It was a pity, too, that they were obliged to bury fifteen tons of the silver. But they saved the gold and pearls.

Like pack-animals they were, staggering. A sailor came to Talbot and the Captain: "Dick Turner asks for you. He is dying."

The Captain said: "I'll go to him."

"He asks for Master Slanning," the sailor said.

"Eh? Go to him, Talbot."

Dick had a story not easily told. It came in gasps. His mother and two sisters lived near Chagford, and he was afraid of Tom Gillard. Tom Gillard could do so much harm. . . . He had been afraid, before this, to tell anybody that he'd seen Gillard coming out of the corridor between the waist cabins only a

moment after the sound of the shot which had killed Robert Butterwalk.

"He did it, Master Slanning! I know he did it!"

If Talbot had thought fast, then, he would have summoned witnesses.

"He grabbed my jerkin, and he whispered to me that if I ever told what had happened—"

But it was not in Talbot, at that instant, to think of witnesses. All he thought was: "Now 'tis Robin's fight—when my sword takes that man, 'twill be of Robin I'll think."

"I was affrighted, Master Slanning, not for myself but for my mother and sisters. Make no doubt! I saw it in his eyes that he had done it! He went there when Master Butterwalk was enjoying a siesta, and he loaded and primed the pistola, and he murdered him and afterward thrust the pistola into his hand. I saw it in his eyes."

Robert and Talbot had hunted otter together, they'd laughed and been boy-fools; and when they'd grown older, sat with tall cups of rough Devonshire cider—aye, cider of the sort that would make a man's tongue curl in against his throat, if it chanced that he was not a Devonshire man. They'd sat there in the Three Crowns full many a time, and spoken of the days when—

The Captain looked up, a shade annoyed.

"If Dick Turner wisheth me to be there—"

"Dick Turner's dead."

The Captain cocked his chin very low, for the load that was on his shoulders. But his eyes went to Talbot.

"If thou hast any want of—"

"I have want of nothing except less chatter!"

"Aye," said Francis Drake; and he walked on in silence. He never knew why his friend Talbot Slanning had spoken in that manner; for Talbot never told—he esteemed it a private matter between himself and one other man.

CHAPTER VIII

THE shaking of the trellis awakened Katherine Abergavenny, and for some time she lay in half a slumber, staring at the thing, wondering why it should be agitated on a night of no breeze. Then she realized with a start that the reason must be the presence of somebody, below.

She rose, wrapped a cloak around her, went to the window. When she saw the vague formless figure of a man, her first impulse was to scream. It was not wholly an impulse of fear. It was a cool enough realization that the scream is usually a woman's best weapon, and in this case might summon a few servants. Tom Gillard, though for the most part keeping to the seas of late, several times had been seen in the neighborhood of Chagford; and it was possible that he'd won full pardon and was prepared again to wreck vengeance upon such local residents as he believed to be his enemies.

She had opened her mouth—when a long-familiar voice reached her. It was scarcely more than a whisper.

"Katherinel! Katherine, my sweet, come down!"

At first she could not believe it. She stood breathless, her mouth open.

"My sweet! My sweet Katherinel!"

She wheeled. On bare feet she raced through dark halls, down dark steps, and fumbled for and found the side door. An instant later she was pressed against Talbot Slanning, with his arms firm and hard around her.

For a little while they did not speak. They scarcely seemed even to breathe, though their hearts thumped wildly and the blood clamored in their pulses.

"Thou hast been well, my sweet? Thou hast not been made to suffer because of me?"

She kissed him by way of answer.

"I called at thy window for that none other should know I'm here. 'Tis but for a few minutes at best, my sweet. I must ride hard to be back before dawn."

"But—but it's on all tongues that thou went with Drake the pirate?"

TALBOT frowned gently, thoughtfully. "Frank Drake's no pirate. Katherine. Or if he be, then would to God that we were a nation of pirates! Aye, I have been with him since the time I quit Plymouth fourteen months ago. Didst not hear he'd returned?"

"Nay. I've not been to the village today."

"We came back this morning—yes-terday morning, by now, eh? And the Sheriff's men boarded us as never the Spaniards dared to do. The decks and cabins were thick with 'em! They have placed the ships and all their cargo in custody, and every man of the ships' companies is under arrest. But Frank's been summoned to the presence of the

Queen's Majesty, and he will make it right."

"Thou hast great confidence in this Captain Drake."

"Aye."

"And thou? Is there not a warrant?"

He smiled, and it was his old smile, the one she loved. Yet this was not the same Talbot Slanning who had said farewell to her at this place fourteen months ago. This man was quieter, darker, grimmer. This was not a hot-headed young fool. This was a man of the world.

"There is a warrant. But our ships were arrested before I was arrested, my sweet." When he saw that this puzzled her, he explained: "No sooner had we dropped anchor when the High Sheriff and his men boarded us with papers. Oh, we were expecting it! We'd learned of it from a fisher we hailed off Scilly. So the papers were read."

HE related that the High Sheriff, with considerable formality and in a basso fitted to his dignity, read a paper which ordered seized in the name of the Queen's Majesty any and all vessels in which Francis Drake, Esquire, of Tavistock and Plymouth, county of Devonshire, should return at any time from the Spanish Indies or the lands of America, together with all and sundry articles and treasures, whether of gold or silver, or of any merchandise whatsoever, which the said vessel or vessels might contain. It likewise, this document, commanded the arrest of the said Francis Drake, Esquire, and of every man who accompanied him and was any part of the company or companies of his ship or any and all his ships. And this until such time as complaints against the said Francis Drake, lodged within this past year by the representatives of His Most Catholic Majesty Philip II, King of Castile, King of Aragon, etc., etc., could be heard and properly disposed of.

"There was a supplemental order commanding Frank to proceed instantly to Exeter, under guard, of course. The court's at Exeter now, for that the Queen is on progress. And then the Sheriff read the second of his papers."

Talbot smiled a shade wryly when he remembered his feelings as this second writ was read. It was, of course, a special royal warrant commanding the arrest of Master Talbot Slanning, erstwhile gentleman-pensioner to the Earl of Sussex. It would mean the double

ordeal—the Little Question and the Big Question. Soon he would be led to the torture-chambers; and if he emerged with his life therefrom, and from the subsequent trial, it was certain that he would be a sadly crippled and hideously mutilated young man. For Tom Gillard's lies had been scattered well; and now that Robert Butterwalk was dead,—by his own hand, so Gillard said, which proved that Robin had been guilty,—there was only Tom Gillard, besides Talbot himself, to testify as to what had happened that night in the Three Crowns. Gillard had spoken first. Talbot's own recital assuredly would be prodded and punctuated by white-hot irons, by splinters, by pincers and knives.

"But Frank refused to give me up a prisoner," Talbot went on. "He said that I had been placed in custody by the first order, and that I must be treated as part of the vessel, like the rest of 'em, like the gold and pearls and silver with which both ships are stocked. Nobody could touch those things, and similarly nobody could touch me. Oh, he's shrewd, Frank is! The High Sheriff had read his papers in the wrong order. Had he read the warrant first, it would have removed me from the ship's company, in the eyes of the law, and afterward the others could be seized, together with the goods and the ships themselves, by instrument of the second order. But he read the seizure first. Therefore my person was held in the name of the Queen's Majesty, but it was held aboard the ship, and none could remove it, even with a writ of *habeas corpus*, unless and until the seizure order was amended or superseded by an instrument signed by the Queen's Majesty herself. The warrant for my arrest was no such instrument, Frank contended, for that it did not specifically provide for violation of the seizure order previously read."

"BUT if thou art still under arrest, and the Sheriff's men aboard the ships—" He laughed.

"Didst think that Sheriff's men could keep me when my Katherine's but a few short miles away? Nay, but they never knew I left—and they never will know, for I can be back before the dawn. There's a gunport very low to the water. It's low," Talbot explained, "because the ship is low, being filled with treasure."

"You swam?"

"Aye. 'Twas no great deep. The night was dark, and the distance short.

Ashore, one who had helped me to escape from England, for a payment, lent me dry clothes and this bonnet and cloak and a fast horse. The same man will help me to return. Then I will remain in floating captivity till Frank makes right the matter at court."

Grave always, she troubled about this. She thought that he should not have taken the risk. If he were caught, he'd be thought doubly guilty. And she assured him that in the minds of all England, he was guilty already.

SHE told him of Gillard, whom she had not seen but of whom she sometimes heard; though most of it was not new to him, he listened closely. Captain Drake had guessed well. Gillard, on his return, had made his peace with the Queen by throwing upon Talbot all the blame for the death of Sir Francis Monckton, and by offering the services of himself, his shallop, his men, all his possessions. This offer had been accepted, and Gillard had spent much time, and all of his money, in Ireland. He was a man ruined, but still alive, still dangerous. Now he was recently back from Ireland, and reports had it that he was planning some desperate move to remake his fortune. Bankrupt, he was ready to try anything.

"I know not what it is he schemes, but 'tis bruited about that he waits for something. The shallop's at anchor in the Catwater, and he never leaves it by night or by day."

"Mayhap he'd wait to determine Frank's success at court? He'll see me freed, Katherine, as himself was freed."

"But he had many to speak in his favor. Besides, he had gold."

"I too have gold, now. And also I have those in high places who will speak for me. Think not that Frank Drake is unversed in politics, or that he went upon this voyage unprepared! Also, my clearance will be more than a matter of prestige to him."

"He hath an affection for thee?"

"I was able to do him certain services at various times."

But he was doing Francis Drake no commendable service now, he reflected. He'd made light of his escape from the fregata, belittling it; but he knew only too well the risk he was running in order to have these few minutes at Abergavenny Manor.

It was worth it! He kissed the girl again. He raised his head, breathing

deep of good Devonshire air. He could smell the honeysuckle, which climbed the lattice to Katherine's window; he could smell the roses; and he thought that he could even smell the smaller, humbler flowers, the wild-flowers tucked away in forgotten places, the violets and pimpernel. After the rank, dank, steaming air of the Darien jungle, this would pleasure the lungs of any true Englishman. After the brash, stifling perfumes of swamp flowers that were rooted in black muck, this was a good odor, a clean odor, and welcome.

"If there was need of money," Katherine was saying, "I could raise a mortgage on Abergavenny Manor."

"You could?"

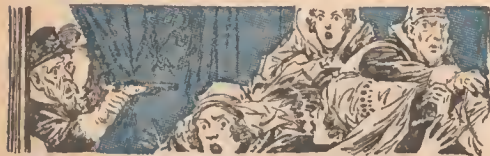
"'Tis mine now," she said simply. "Father died three days after you went. He never recovered from that beating."

Talbot said, "Oh!" with no particular expression, and stared down Abergavenny Lane.

The girl realized his thought.

She whispered: "Thou must be careful, Talbot! Talbot, my love! Remember the last time."

"The last time I was not permitted to finish what I'd started," he reminded her. "But when I meet him again—and 'twill be soon, believe me, Katherine—when I meet him again—"



CHAPTER IX

NED CROCKER, he of the wineshop on the Barbican, was a man of many enterprises, all shady. He was a very big man, slow-moving, phlegmatic, and did not look like a criminal; indeed it is probable that he did not consider himself to be such, and in one sense he was not; for he was rather a helper of criminals, an abettor of fugitives, one who kept them in concealment, or passed them along, or provided them with such articles as they could not themselves venture to purchase in the open marketplace. His customers were of many nationalities, of many walks of life—though it was true that most of his tasks appertained in some manner to the sea; but each of them was able and willing to pay in advance for the serv-

ices he asked. When Talbot Slanning and Robert Butterwalk had appeared in his shop, and had candidly told him of their predicament, he showed not the slightest amazement or fear or suspicion, but without hesitation fixed a price. Similarly when, fourteen months later, a signal-knock caused him to open his back door and find there one of these same young men, dripping wet but with a purse that clinked pleasantly, Ned Crocker contracted instantly to do as this young man wished.

HOWEVER, when Talbot returned to Plymouth this night and sought him out at the end of the little stone quay, there was some show of annoyance in the man's flat face.

"Thou'rt late," he muttered. "They'll be changing the watch soon."

Talbot sprang into the rowboat, laughing quietly.

"Pull well for it, Master Crocker, and trust to God and the darkness! 'Twas a good beast, and it waits for you in yonder street. As to these clothes, I'll see that they are returned to you so soon as I'm free to be about."

Crocker's boat had muffled oarlocks, and he himself had much experience in silence. They made never a sound as they slid out into the Catwater, moving as far as possible in the shadow of the quays and of the anchored vessels. Few lights were visible, and those dim. A mist hung over the water.

The *Swan* and the *Pascha* had long since been scuttled, and the newcomers in Plymouth harbor were captured Spanish fregatas built in Habana by Pero Menendez himself, mightily armed vessels, having been designed for protection of Spanish commerce. They were not large but they were sturdy, and extraordinarily fast. They floated very low in the water now, because of their heavy cargoes.

The larger ship of the two, and the faster, Captain Drake's flagship, was named, oddly enough, *El Draque*—the very name the Spaniards had given to Francis Drake himself.

They were near this ship now. They slipped into the shadow of a shallop, a low slim vessel. Amidships a man leaned on the rail gazing at a dawn-smear sky. They passed so close that Talbot could almost have stood up and touched the man's arm. Thus Talbot had a good look at him, though the man himself did not even see the boat below.

That face! But where? When? He was not a sailor, for he was small, pale, thin, and there were no rings in his ears. He had a small, mean face, the face of a rat.

Already there were drifting past the shallop, and now Ned Crocker was backing water. Talbot leaned forward, whispering:

"Whose boat is that we passed but now?"

"Tom Gillard's."

Crocker was squinting across the low, restless mist toward *El Draque*.

"I fear you'll have to swim for it, sir. The after watch is awake, and I'll not be able to get close. Leave your cloak and gamashes here, and keep your arms under water. I'll row you to the larboard side, and as you crawl through that port, I'll make a splash to draw his attention."

Talbot shook his head. He had remembered, now, the identity of the rat-faced man. And something inside of him became very cold, very stiff. He was seeing that weirdly lighted room in *Nombre de Dios* far away, and the thin straight back of Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia, and hearing again the toneless unceasing prayer.

"What does Gillard do these days, Crocker?"

"Nay, what matters that? Why, then, he stays aboard that craft of his, waiting for something or somebody, none knows what. But he does not permit any of his crew ashore except those who go to fetch supplies or visitors."

"And these visitors?"

"Sir, we've very little time left, an you'd be aboard that fregata before the change of watch. The mist—"

Talbot repeated: "These visitors?"

"Spanish gentlemen, or Portuguese. I know not which. They've been coming down the Exeter road, and are taken out to Gillard's vessel, and afterward they return by the Exeter road again. They do not tarry in the city."

The Queen was at Exeter!

"And what of supplies? Has he bought much?"

"Aye. The vessel's well stocked."

"But I'd heard it bruited that Gillard was penniless?"

company of any personage so notorious as Talbot Slanning. Crocker's private opinion was that Master Slanning was a trifle mad; for surely there was no hint of sanity in one who'd escape from the clutches of an angry monarch only to return there before he was missed!

"He was stripped clean," Crocker answered, "but yet he buys supplies. I know not where he gets it, all this gold he gives."

"Gold? Spanish gold?"

"Aye, Spanish pieces. Likely he fetched them from the Americas when he returned with Ranse."

"Tom Gillard," Talbot said slowly, "brought no gold from the Americas."

"Nay, I know naught of that, sir. But if you wish to make the fregata before the watch—"

"Turn back. I'll not swim it. Not now."

"Eh? You'd go to France then?"

"No, I'll go to Tom Gillard's boat. But I'd go without splash." Talbot shifted close to the oarsman, dropped a couple of coins into his lap. "You saw that fellow leaning against the rail, eh? I'll take him."

"Take him?"

"Take him. Carry him off. I've an overpowering desire to speak to that man alone, but it must be in some place where the noise will be of no matter."

THAT this customer was mad, Crocker was now thoroughly convinced. But his metal was sound—Spanish gold was good gold the wide world over.

"Tom Gillard's no man to be playing pranks with, sir."

Another coin dropped. Another piece of Spanish gold.

"I'll do the taking. You keep the boat underneath."

Crocker hesitated. The boldness of the proposal gave pause even to a hardened old sinner like him.

"I'll not put a foot on that shallop, but if you wish to. . . . If aught goes amiss, I'll off without a word. And afterward, an they come to me, I'll swear I never saw you."

"Fair enough! Now to that rail, and make not a ripple!"

They slipped through water as silent as the morning mist that crawled and writhed low around them. Rat-face still leaned on the rail, still gazed at the sky where dawn was washing away the dimmed stars. He might have been suffering from insomnia, or from home-

CROCKER shrugged. He had little patience with these questions. The mist was lifting, the sky growing bright; and Crocker, already no stranger to the Sheriff, didn't wish to be seen in the

sickness. Certainly he did not look like a watch; and this fact troubled Talbot; for the presence of any other man on deck would spoil the kidnaping.

Talbot slipped off his cloak. He had no weapon of any sort. The cloak would be enough—together with a loop of thin strong rope Ned Crocker had handed to him. They were on the larboard side of the shallop. Talbot, standing on the stern seat, was able to reach the rail-posts. He drew himself up without a sound. His cloak was thrown over his right shoulder, and the rope was between his teeth.

The deck was otherwise deserted, and there was no light. Talbot crossed like a cat to the starboard rail. Rat-face heard not a thing until the folds of the cloak enveloped him. It may be that he cursed, or screamed; but the cloak permitted no sound to escape, and the loop of rope followed the cloak with lightning speed, fastening Rat-face's arms to his sides. Talbot lifted the fellow on one shoulder—he was a little man, not heavy—and carried him across the deck. Holding the feet, he slid him over the rail. Ned Crocker, standing in the boat, lowered him without a sound.

"Ho! What make you here?"

Talbot wheeled—to find himself facing Tom Gillard; up for a sniff of early air, he was fully dressed. Fully armed, too. But Talbot had one incalculable advantage: Talbot was not astounded by the meeting.

GILLARD caught in his breath, took a step backward. His right hand moved for his rapier.

Talbot took two swift steps forward and drove his right fist into the pit of Gillard's stomach. He put behind the blow every ounce of weight and strength in his body. And Tom Gillard, big man though he was, emitted one chopped-off wheezy "*oonk!*" and sat down.

Talbot vaulted the rail. "*Row, man!*" The boat fairly sprang away; and the mist, disturbed in its languid swirling, was thrown into a puzzled soundless turmoil.

The bundle at the bottom of the boat was motionless.

"There's burlap beneath the seat," Ned Crocker grunted. "Wrap him so he'll look like a sack of goods."

"He doesn't move. Did you hit him?"

The stone quay was only two hundred feet from the shallop, and they scraped along the far side of it.

"I hit him once. To keep him quiet. I misdoubt that I killed him."

"I hope you didn't," Talbot muttered. "I have need of this man alive."

It had all happened very quickly. They were quitting the quay, Crocker seemingly not in the least embarrassed by the load he carried on his back, when the first roars from the shallop testified that Tom Gillard had caught his breath.

CHAPTER X

THE first thing Francis Drake noticed was that most of the truly important men were wearing leg-o'-mutton rather than bishop sleeves. He was glad of this, for he had selected leg-o'-mutton sleeves for himself only after great worriment. Waists, he noted, were narrower, ruffs fuller, capes shorter; shoulders were higher with padded welts; breasts and legs were made shapely by means of bombast and buskin; there were more morions, fewer burganets. Only the hose showed a French influence: men were wearing shorter hose than they wore when Francis Drake had sailed from Plymouth.

With the Spanish fashions in dress he was in accord, and indeed they were singularly convenient for a man who for more than a year had been obliged to fish his wardrobe from captured Spanish vessels; but the deeper Spanish influences here amazed and alarmed him. There were Spaniards everywhere. They seemed very certain of their position. Unofficially present, still unrecognized, they behaved as though they were in fact lords of the Council.

Sundry occurrences over which Captain Drake had no control, and could not have anticipated, had brought about this change. Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alva, had been removed as Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, and English trade with the Low Countries had been resumed. More important were the St. Bartholomew's massacres. Elizabeth, as the Protestant champion, had no choice but to frown upon France after that hideous slaughter. But frowning upon France meant smiling upon Spain; England was too weak to think of being the enemy of both of these powers. And so it was that the Spanish gentlemen strutted at Powderham this day, and basked in the sun, while Francis Drake stood obscurely in a corner. . . .

When the whisper came that the Queen approached, Francis Drake felt no happier. For the whisper included some account of the hawking by the way. Soon out of Exeter, it seems, the hounds had raised a large heron, and Elizabeth herself had unhooded and unjessed *Pride-Girl*, her own favorite lanner. But of sport there had been none. *Pride-Girl*, already fed that morning (which was the fault of the falconers) and unjessed downwind (which emphatically was the fault of the Queen herself) had flown low, refusing to sight the heron, refusing even to answer whistles, and had been lost somewhere in the west. It was humiliating. The Queen knew as well as everybody else that she had been inexcusably *maladroit*. She didn't fancy disobedience in anybody or anything around her, not even a hawk. Besides, *Pride-Girl* had been an expensive bird.

In addition, the whispers had it that the Queen's health was no better. Francis Drake, like dozens of others, wondered as he was pushed back against the wall, unbonneting, how much the future of England might depend upon the state of that unpredictable royal digestion.

Gentlemen came first, in pairs, then the barons, the earls, the Knights of the Garter. The Chancellor waddled across the courtyard, bearing seals in a red-silk purse. A gentleman carried high the sword of state, point up: it was in a red scabbard studded with golden *fleurs-de-lis*. After him came another gentleman who bore the royal scepter on a red silk pillow.

Then came Elizabeth.

A thin, rather small woman in gray taffeta, tense, alert, moving swiftly but jerkily, with a slight limp. The sharp chin was tilted high, and the oblong unsmiling face, covered with pale freckles, was rigid. But the eyes moved. They were small, dark, peering eyes; and they went back and forth, back and forth, ceaselessly.

IF she saw Francis Drake,—which was unlikely,—she gave no sign. But she was neither nodding nor smiling this morning, anyway. She muttered a few words to Cecil, to Sir William Courtenay, her host, and scurried through a doorway and into the shadows of Powderham Castle. A handful of ladies-in-waiting followed her; a handful of her own guardsmen, bearing scarlet-tasseled halberds; then the door was closed.

The company in the courtyard rose, buzzing.

But Francis Drake was in no mood for gossip. Men were pointing him out, whispering about him; but he did not heed them. Some, he knew, were calling him pirate. A few were men with whom he wished to talk—but not in this crowded place. Besides, he must speak with the Queen first. Publicly, she would doubtless call him hard names. He didn't care; it was what she said in closet that counted; and it was only in private that he could promise her, secretly, when the lawyers had finished making their show of papers and seals and signatures, a goodly portion of the treasure in the holds of his two ships. Then Elizabeth would smile, if she dared. It might be that Spanish pressure would be too strong against her. He thought he knew her personal inclinations (every man in court thought this much), but he could not predict when or how vehemently she might act upon them, or when she might veer and tack, now sailing straight before the wind, now inexplicably making a great yaw. Spain or France, France or Spain? Which would it be? Who was to know?

DRAKE strolled out of the courtyard and into a small garden at the rear of the castle. It was deserted. At the far end a sallyport was closed but unlocked, and through its bars was visible a footbridge leading across the scummy moat. Captain Drake wondered idly why it was not guarded. There was a horse on the far side of the footbridge; it was a small black horse, and looked fast; the red-leather saddle was high, rather Moorish, and stamped with a device not familiar to the Captain—sable, a fess wavy argent, between two inverted axes proper.

These things Francis Drake saw; and fleetingly he wondered at them, as he wondered that so pleasant a place as this garden should be deserted, while men crowded and jostled one another in the courtyard near by. But mostly his mind was occupied with thoughts of a different nature.

Men erred who supposed that this mariner sought gold alone. He was no petty merchant, snatching his gains and hugging them to his bosom. He would alter the trade habits of the whole world. He would singe the beard of the greatest living monarch. A mosquito, he'd bite a lion to death. Of all the

treasure which lay in the two vessels in the Catwater—the treasure for which he had plotted and schemed, and bribed and dickered, and moiled and mucked and fought, for which he had repeatedly risked everything he owned, including his very life and reputation—he did not expect to retain one coin. He thought of it not as a fortune, but only a means. He would gladly spend it all, if it enabled him to go robbing on the scale of which he dreamed. For he was a true gambler, this thirty-two-year-old red-head—a gambler who never dragged his winnings across the board, but unflinchingly and unhesitatingly permitted them to lie, doubling the stake for the next cast.

His dream now was of that Southern Sea he'd glimpsed: the Pacific. Wrested from Spain, what a field for trade it would make! What an opportunity!

But so much depended now upon the Queen. He must fight now not on the half-deck, where he was at home and happy, but in a world of whispers, of broken vows, of cliques, intrigues, unspoken understandings. Neither astrology nor good Toledo steel would get him through this maze of personalities; and he was confused, even alarmed.

A menial coughed, bowing.

"Gracious your worship, 'tis forbidden that anybody be in this garden whilst the Queen's Majesty changes her garb."

"Eh?"

"The Queen's Majesty is with her tiring-women in yonder chamber, your worship." The menial indicated two large windows about ten feet from the ground, near the sallyport. The casements were open, but the windows were covered inside by heavy arrases. "Should it perchance that a breeze bestirred the tapestry," the menial explained, "'twould be possible for a man in this garden to see that which he should not." There was somewhat of a grin tugging at the fellow's mouth. "For Her Majesty to retire to an inner chamber would mean dim light and discomfiting warmth."

"Ah," said Captain Drake, and handed the fellow a copper. "Gramercy for thy warning. I'll quit the place."

THE CAPTAIN himself was as near as ever he came to smiling. The Queen's personal modesty was notorious, her virginity something she advertised loudly.

So Francis Drake started hastily after the servant.

He was stopped by collision with the last man in this world he had expected to see at Powderham.

"Merciful God in Heaven! Hast gone mad?"

Certainly Talbot Slanning looked the madman. His sword-belt, a strange one, was awry. His doublet and hair—he was without bonnet—were gray with dust. Dust was caked upon his face, too, and sifted into the crevices of his features.

HE grabbed the Captain's arms, shook him.

"The Queen, Frank! Where is the Queen?"

Talbot tumbled out the story, gasping for breath. Rat-face, whom he had left in the custody of Ned Crocker, had been too frightened to do anything but tell the truth!

Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia, back from New Spain, had got himself transferred to the household of one of the grandees stationed as unofficial ambassador in England. He held a petty, inconspicuous post. But his vow, and the extent of his fanaticism, were well known to his fellow-countrymen here; and he was being used as an instrument of assassination. The plot had been carefully laid. If it failed, Don Alvaro would take the whole blame, and considering himself a martyr, would not divulge the names of those who had backed him: he was the kind of man who would die on the rack without moving his lips. If he succeeded, it meant civil war.

"But how didst catch this man? How did—"

Talbot gestured impatiently.

"There's not the time to tell thee! 'Tis to be this very morning, and the scoundrel has two pistols!"

After the murder Don Alvaro was to ride for Plymouth on a horse provided for this purpose. There he was to join his fellow-conspirators aboard Tom Gillard's shallop, which was ready to sail at a moment's notice, and they were to carry the news to Spain. Gillard had been bought with Spanish gold and the promise of a Spanish title and estate.

"At Exeter they told me the Queen had come here! Where is she, Frank? In God's name, *where is she?* The guards at the gate thought me mad, and I slipped past them in the confusion."

"But the Queen's safe and well. I saw her with mine own eyes, scarce fifteen minutes past. She's changing from

riding-dress, in the chamber behind yonder arras—"

Talbot glanced wildly at the two open windows. The arras was motionless. To the right, lower, nearer the center of the castle, were two other open windows, smaller, uncurtained, discovering steps. To the left was the sallyport. Talbot saw that the sallyport was unlocked. He wheeled on the servant.

"Is there no guard at that gate, varlet?"

"There—there should be. . . . Aye, 'twas always—"

Talbot ran a few steps toward the gate. He saw the black horse, fresh and fast and thin, and the red Moorish saddle. He saw the device upon that saddle—sable, a fess wavy argent between two inverted axes proper. He had seen that device before. Where? Why, on the left sleeve of Rat-face's coat, where every bodyservant wore his master's cognisance.

"Call the guard, Frank! Call out the guard!"

He raced for the small windows. The menial got in his way, but he knocked the fellow backward with a blow on the chest. He scrambled through a window, raced up the steps.

"*The guard! Ho, the guard!*"

At the head of the steps he found a guardsman. He lay sprawled on the pavement in front of a smaller, branching corridor, and blood came in a full free stream from a wound in the left side of his neck above the gorget.

Drops of blood led away from this corpse, and down the small passage. But even without this, it was obvious that the man had been guarding the entrance of the small passage. There was a door at the end. Talbot ran there, burst through, shoved aside an arras—and came upon the Queen.

"Merciful angels of heaven!"

FOR all the efforts of poets and court painters to convince a skeptical world, Elizabeth never had been beautiful. Now she was within a few weeks of forty. She stood in the center of the chamber; and she was wigless, unpainted, garbed only in cotton underwear. Talbot stamped to a halt not four feet from her, but she did not stir, and after that single exclamation she said not a word. Her head was high, her black teeth bared almost as though in a snarl, but her eyes were utterly calm, even cold.

Of the five tiring-women about her, two ran screaming from the room; two others, who had been kneeling, thumped into sitting positions on the floor and stared unmoving, stunned, at the intruder; the fifth silently fainted.

"Madam—Your Majesty—"

The arras covering the two garden windows stirred at one end. A long blue pistol-barrel appeared there, a dark head behind it.

The Queen was nearer to Talbot than was the pistol, so with the quickness of thought, he sprang upon the Queen.

A WHIRRING sound, a brief hissing shower of sparks, then a click. The pistol had missed fire. A second pistol appeared.

Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia had entered by the same door as Talbot, using a key with which he had been provided, and had moved behind the tapestries covering the wall until he had his back to the windows that faced the garden.

Another whirr, another shower of sparks. An explosion. On the far side of the room a dozen tiny shards flew in as many directions, and a flat chunk of lead fell to the floor.

Smoke drifted carelessly across the chamber. One of the women started to scream: she screamed as loudly as she could, without words, without sense, and with never a pause. Talbot, on hands and knees, saw the tapestry stir again. He sprang to his feet.

Elizabeth of England was flat on her back, where he'd pushed her. She no longer looked like an outraged queen, a lioness at bay. She looked only like what she was—a flabbergasted old woman garbed only in underclothes.

The tiring-woman stopped screaming and toppled sideways in a swoon.

Talbot ran to the tapestry, yanked it with both hands. Its folds fell about his head. He pushed them aside. Before him, at the other end of the garden, men were running from the courtyard, waving weapons. Immediately below, rising to his feet, was Don Alvaro Jesus de Santillana y Canovia.

Talbot vaulted the window-sill.

Don Alvaro must be captured alive. Otherwise it would be difficult if not impossible to prove that he, Talbot Slanning, had not himself some part in this attempt upon the Queen's life.

The Spaniard slipped through the sallyport, slamming it behind him. Tal-

bot wrenched it open, raced out upon the bridge.

This footbridge was no more than a temporary thing, put there for the convenience of servants during the extensive preparations which had preceded the coming of the Queen. It was, in fact, a single ten-inch plank, nothing more. It was about fourteen feet long.

Don Alvaro, at the other bank, wheeled, stooping. He'd heard the pursuit. He grasped the end of the plank. Talbot jumped.

The plank splashed into the moat, but Talbot had landed sprawling on the edge of the bank, grabbing two handfuls of weeds and grasses. He rolled, avoiding a rapier which would have pinned him to the earth. He rose. His own rapier came out.

"Sol!"

"Madre de Dios! You diel!"

It was the first time Talbot actually had seen the face of this Don Alvaro Santillana, and the sight caused him to shiver. A skeleton. The eyes were great black blobs of light in a face that was pale, brittle as flint, taut as though drawn in pain. The man should have been dead, but he was alive—and fighting.

How he was fighting! Even Talbot backed away from that lunatic rush. But presently Talbot stood.

The men who had swarmed across the garden and who now crowded through the sallygate to pause baffled at the edge of the bridgeless moat, for the most part occupied themselves in those few swift moments with shouting for bowmen or trying to salvage the floating plank. A few cool ones merely watched the combat; and these were rewarded by some very pretty swordplay.

DON ALVARO, insane though he might be, had muscles from nowhere and a hate-sharpened brain. He moved like a shadow, all nerve and speed, deadily, utterly cold.

Talbot's case was otherwise. He did not wish to kill. He feared this more than he feared the sliver of bright steel which danced before his eyes and licked in and out around his guard. He saw almost instantly that Don Alvaro's breast was protected by a brigandine. That rigidity of the torso, that stiffness when the dagger arm was drawn back, was not wholly accountable to Spanish pride. There was mail under the doublet. So—a full thrust for the heart or

lungs would mean a snapped blade, and death.

But Talbot had no thought of thrusting. This man must live! The throat was unprotected, and the eyes; but these he avoided. He worked for the right arm only.

Maniacs have a vitality which comes from none knows where. Four times Talbot reached the upper right arm with short hard cuts, and twice his point snicked briefly into the forearm. But still Don Alvaro fought on.

A LONG desperate thrust slid through the flesh of Talbot's left armpit. It burned. Exasperated, he stepped in, cutting open the Spaniard's left cheek. Blood spattered like rain in springtime. The man would collapse yet. He *had* to collapse! Madman or no, he could not fight much longer.

But it was a matter of seconds. Neither would remain alive when the bowmen came, or when guardsmen, running out of the main gate and around the castle, reached them back here. They would be cut to pieces without question. For it was a time when men did not stop for parleys. The Queen's life had been attempted.

Don Alvaro disengaged twice, raised his guard, swept into a beautiful lunge for the heart. It was swift as light. Talbot caught it barely in time, raised the blade, straightening his own arm. And Don Alvaro spitted himself upon Talbot's blade, which slipped without a sound through his throat.

Don Alvaro fell—instantaneously, indisputably dead.

Talbot stepped back, coughing, choking with rage. He'd done what he had meant not to do.

A quarrel struck his left arm, whirling him around. He fell, cursing. As he got up, an arrow thunked into the ground where he'd been.

The bowmen had arrived. And around a corner of the castle came men who waved swords and bucklers. No, assuredly there would not be time for questions and answers. He would have liked to pause, to explain. But his first instinct was to dodge death. The black Neapolitan mare had not stirred throughout this fight. Talbot, scornful, vaulted into the red saddle and was off.

There were two musket explosions. An arrow glanced against the mare's neck, raising a red welt.

BLADE OF THE BUCCANEERS

The mare swerved only for an instant. An exquisite beast, the fastest Talbot ever had known.

He leaned low. On his right the Exe twinkled sleepily in the warm August sunshine. There was a great clamor behind him.

For fully two miles Talbot rode before it came to him that he was going north, toward Exeter, away from Plymouth. But Plymouth was the place he wished to go. For Rat-face was in Plymouth, and so was Tom Gillard and the Spanish associates of Gillard. These men he'd confront, and he'd cause their arrest, before he himself submitted. Without them, he was lost.

The mare ran smoothly, perfectly. Talbot reined to the left at the first lane, and soon he was galloping across the moor. He knew every inch of this moor. It was possible, he estimated, that by going through or near Chudleigh, and under the shadow of Rippon Tor, close to Newton Abbot and Dean Prior, he might reach Plymouth ahead of such of those at Powderham quick-witted enough to guess that he would make for that city. The road by way of Torquay, along the shore, was better but not as short.

After a time he turned left again, for the thought had come to him that by going west this far he would give pursuers the notion that he was making for Chagford, and this would mean that they'd annoy Katherine.

IT was about noon, when, somewhere near Ashburton, he drew rein at a peasant's hut.

"Wine, man! I'll pay well!"

The peasant had no wine.

"Water, then!"

"Yuh-yuh ride on the Queen's Majesty's business?"

Talbot smiled grimly.

"Aye," he said.

He heard the sound of hoofs, from the north.

"Hast sharp ears? Is that one horse only?"

"Aye, one horse, your worship."

Talbot pursed his lips, staring at the black mare. It had run marvelously well; and given even a short rest it would run well still. But to push it, now, would be to kill it. He led it around to the back of the hut, and drew rapier and dagger.

"An this fellow rides past, I'll not stir. An he pauses, keep out of our way!"

The hoofbeats came nearer, slowed, and stopped in front of the hut. Talbot gripped his sword. He heard a creak of leather, the scuff of feet, then a voice:

"Ho, fellow! Hast seen a young mad-cap ride past here on a black steed with a high red saddle, eh?"

TALBOT ran around the corner of the hut.

"Frank! Frank! Whatever makest thou here?"

"Talbot, lad! Art safe?"

It was embarrassing for both of them. They embraced, but with forced carelessness. They drank water together, and watered their steeds and rubbed down the beasts, all the while talking.

"Wert for Plymouth?"

"Aye. I went north at first."

"I slipped away in the excitement. Methought 'twas my part to gallop for Plymouth and Ned Crocker there, and this prisoner of Crocker's of whom you spoke."

"Knowest Ned, then?"

"Aye, and who doth not? Just there's the trouble. Thou knowest Ned, and I know him, and many, many others. Tom Gillard, for the mention of but one."

Talbot said slowly: "Aye, Tom Gillard."

"Gillard will miss this Spanish servant, and thinkst thou not he'll guess where to look? For if that servant blabs, what would become of Tom Gillard, eh?"

"Aye—"

"My hope is that we'll get there first." He put a hand on Talbot's sleeve. "For mark ye, lad, on that servant's tale all our safety depends."

"Our safety?"

"Oh, 'tis mine as well! The Spaniards have her ears now, and should it seem as though one of my own ship's company was involved in a plot upon her life, what would happen to Francis Drake? Yet if we prove 'twas all a Spanish plot—as we can do through this servant—then will I become a patriot and no pirate, and then will we win her permission for another voyage soon."

Talbot nodded, grinned.

"Another voyage. . . . The Southern Sea, eh?"

"The Southern Sea, lad! And the gold we've seen these past months will be floor-sweepings to what we'll pluck there!"

They mounted and were off. They did not talk, but rode hard. There was one brief pause. Fairly within sight of the steel of St. Andrew's, six men sprang into their path, grabbing the reins of both steeds. These men held bludgeons.

"Your purses, my fine lords!"

Talbot reached for his sword, but Francis Drake, furious at the delay, roared, "Robbers, eh?" and fired a small pistol. A man fell, shot in the groin, screaming. The others stumbled back. "Robbers, eh? Come, Talbot lad!" They rode on.

Nobody turned to stare at them as they cantered into old Plymouth town. There was no movement, no gossip, to suggest that the news had reached this place.

Yet it was impossible to believe that the Spaniards had not posted at least one lookout at Powderham to insure that word be sent to Plymouth in the event that the plan miscarried. Such a messenger would do nothing to raise an alarm.

They went to the back of Crocker's wineshop, and gave the signal-knock. They received no answer.

Francis Drake shifted from foot to foot, regularly, unthinkingly, but his face was grave as that of any parson. Talbot was frankly worried. He wet his lips with a nervous tongue-tip.

They knocked again. Still no answer.

Talbot tried the door, and it opened to his hand. They went quickly but quietly upstairs, to a room in front overlooking the Barbican, the very room in which Talbot and Robert Butterwalk had waited for completion of the negotiations with Captain Vaarts. It was here Ned Crocker was to have stayed with his prisoner.

CROCKER had not quit the place. He was lying face-down on the floor, the back of his head a red mass; the blood was beginning to dry around the edges. Of Rat-face the only sign was a length of cord cut in many places.

On the floor was a gold coin—Spanish gold. The Captain toed it incuriously; and he whispered: "So Tom Gillard *did* know where to look?"

They hurried downstairs. They left their horses, preferring to wriggle and squirm through the crowd the short distance to the quay, where they stood and watched the sails of the Gillard shallop fill slowly, tantalizingly, as she moved out of the Catwater.

"She's fast. What will overhaul her?"

Francis Drake looked around. Better than any man alive, perhaps, he knew the shipping of Plymouth harbor. From the top of a mast here, a sharply steeved bowsprit there, a peaked yardarm, the merest corner of a square tuck, an overhanging stern-castle glittering with tiny square windows, from these things, at a glance, he knew the ship and remembered her abilities, could calculate how much time would be needed to get her out into the Sound.

"There must be *one* vessel!"

"There is one, and only one," Francis Drake said. "'Twas made by the Spaniards themselves, too."

"Frank, it is not—"

"'Tis a shade heavy in the water just now; but for all of that, I'll warrant it will overhaul anything afloat in this harbor. And if the Sheriff's men and the Queen's commissioners will not listen to our words—on my conscience, Talbot, lad, we'll talk to them a louder language!"



CHAPTER XI

GUARDSMEN had swept into Chagford like a gale from the sea, and soon they swarmed over Abergavenny Manor. Katherine, frightened but calm, stood in the center of the hall and for some time tried in vain to get an explanation of this business. The guardsmen surrounded her, shouted questions, dashed away before she had a chance to answer—only to come rushing back an instant later with further questions. There was no politeness in these soldiers. This was a great national emergency, and they were privileged searchers; there could be no danger of treading on the wrong toes. Besides, who was this country girl alone in an old manor house? What possible connections could she have? The Western gentry were not, at the hour, of notable importance at court. Sir Francis Monckton was dead, and his cousin Tom Gillard in disgrace; John Gilbert of Compton and Greenway was a bumpkin, inert, powerless; Sir Humphrey Gilbert, blundering through the mud of the Netherlands, was technically at least an out-

cast; the Grenvilles, Carews, Fortesques, remained remote, dabbling in Irish undertakings, or in petty piracy; the star of Walter Raleigh had not yet risen.

The one thing Katherine was able to learn, promptly and unmistakably, was that these men sought Talbot Slanning. Talbot, she gathered, was believed to be the head of a gigantic conspiracy to overthrow the Queen's Majesty, to kill Elizabeth herself, to kill also Hatton, Leicester, Cecil, Sussex, to place Mary of Scotland upon the throne. It was a French plot, some said; but most of them said it was a Spanish plot. All were agreed that Talbot was its genius. He himself had slain two men and had endeavored to kidnap the Queen's own person. He had escaped, riding in this direction.

"Where is he? Where have ye hidden him?"

Katherine Abergavenny stood very still, looking taller than in fact she was, and her hazel eyes held only scorn.

"I know not where Talbot Slanning may be."

"You've hidden him! He rode this way! Where is he?"

The captain of the guardsmen cried: "Say now, this Master Slanning was your lover, was he not?"

"He was my betrothed."

"He was your lover," the guardsman rasped. "There'd been no betrothal."

"There'd been no time. We had planned to post banns—"

"When Master Slanning murdered Sir Francis Monckton, eh? Aye, 'tis well remembered, I can tell ye!"

For a little time after that the captain did not disturb her but busied himself directing the search. Not only the house, but all the outbuildings as well, and the grounds, were tramped over again and again. Tapestries were yanked from the walls. Every room, every closet, was entered. Katherine's own wardrobe was spread upon the floor, as though the soldiers expected to find Talbot Slanning concealed in the folds of her gowns.

THE captain strode back to the great hall.

"You know where this man is!"

"I do not."

"You've not seen him? He's not been here since he returned with that pirate Drake?"

Katherine did not hesitate. Normally there was no woman more truthful and frank; it was not merely a habit with her,

but a conviction. But where Talbot was concerned, there was for Katherine Abergavenny only one truth, which was Talbot's safety.

"I have not seen him since he left these parts."

The captain was a black-bearded fellow of truculent appearance, not really bad-hearted, not professionally and habitually a bully, but just now convinced that only aggressiveness would serve to find Slanning. He loved and feared his Queen, and he knew his duty.

"You're lying," he said harshly. He gripped her arm with big bruising fingers and marched her toward the staircase. "You'll remain in your own bed-chamber till we've completed the search, and if then we've found nothing we'll return to question you. It won't be long," he added grimly; "and the questioning won't be tender. This is high treason, my fine lady!"

WHEN he had locked her in, she hesitated not an instant. She did not know where Talbot was, but she knew Captain Drake's ships lay in the Cat-water at Plymouth; and she knew (Talbot himself had told her) that Captain Drake loved him. Drake was, to her, a pirate, a desperate, murdering adventurer of the sea; but if Talbot trusted him, Katherine would trust him.

The key had scarcely turned in the lock when she was at the window and testing the trellis upon which honeysuckle grew. Once this trellis had made her a perfect ladder. She had not been on it since her early 'teens. It was older now, and she herself rather heavier; yet she clambered out unhesitatingly.

It held. She ran around to the front of the house, clinging to the shelter of rose bushes, which tore her gown.

In front were seven horses, not tethered, with a single none-too-alert groom. Katherine ran toward them—ran fast but silently. She knew horses; instinctively she selected the swiftest of these beasts; her foot scarcely touched the stirrup as she mounted. The groom yelled. Somebody came running out of the house. But by that time Katherine was halfway down Abergavenny Lane.

At the mouth of the lane was a sentry. He had drawn a saber when he heard the shouts from the manor-house, but the last thing he expected was a pretty girl in black velvet, riding low and hard. He gaped. As she flashed past him, he tried to grab the reins; and failing in

this, he slashed at the horse's rump. Both actions were tardy. Katherine was riding south. . . .

There was no special evidence of excitement in Plymouth when she arrived. She had herself rowed to the disputed Spanish fregata.

The Sheriff, large, fat, worried, was too kind a man actually to refuse her admittance to the deck, but he explained that Captain Drake was not aboard, and that the ship was in official custody.

"But I must see Captain Drake! Tell me, does he return soon?"

"Nay, I know that not. He's been summoned to attend the Queen's Majesty at Powderham. But if he comes back or no, you shall not remain on this ship, ma'am."

He was pushing her gently toward the ladder, at the foot of which the hired boatman waited. All about them was the bustle of Plymouth harbor, the busy boat-traffic, the bang and clatter of the docks less than two hundred feet away.

Katherine, desperate, tried one more chance.

"Is Master Talbot Slanning aboard then, pray?"

The Sheriff's hand tightened on her arm; his eyes became small and thoughtful. Two of his deputies approached, and they too were staring curiously at Katherine Abergavenny.

"Nay, ma'am, and what do you know of Master Slanning?"

"Is he aboard? I'd speak to him."

"He is not aboard," the Sheriff said slowly; "but know ye where he's been these twelve hours past?"

"I know that he's—" Katherine stopped, for the grip on her arm had become painfully tight. "Nay," she said hastily. "I've no knowledge of him."

LACKING practice, she was a poor liar. The Sheriff nodded meaningly. Then he waved away the boatman, and led Katherine to the stern cabin, a small but richly furnished place. He closed the door.

"Ma'am," he said solemnly, "this is Queen's business, and I am the Queen's agent in Devonshire. You must answer my questions with the truth, or you become a party to high treason. I know from your face that you have some knowledge of Master Slanning's whereabouts. My position and mayhap my very life are at stake."

"I tell you, Master Sheriff, I know not where he may be."

"Where *has* he been, then? Where was he yesternight?"

"Nay, I—I know not."

He came very close to her. He was a good man, the Sheriff, and a man of religion, a father, naturally reluctant to exercise violence upon a female. But since dawn he'd been racked with anxiety about the location of his most important prisoner; he was wild with worry; he knew the importance of Talbot Slanning to the court, and he dreaded to think of the punishment he himself faced if Slanning was not found and returned to custody.

"Ma'am, I have three deputies aboard this ship, and two Queen's Commissioners who are here to guard the treasure in the hold. These men are under my command. The crew can do nothing, for that I've sent all their weapons ashore. Below, besides the gold and silver, there's a cell with leg-irons and wrist-irons, and nobody can hear the noises made in that cell. You go there, ma'am, at this very instant, and my men go with you to beat you and twist your arms, unless you talk honestly with me here and now."

Katherine shook her head. She whispered: "I know not where he is."

The Sheriff took her arm. "Come," he said, rather sadly.

HURRIED steps sounded on the deck. The door flew open, and a short, dusty, red-bearded young man burst into the cabin. He paid not the slightest attention to Katherine, but addressed himself to the Sheriff.

"Ask me not why I do this, for there's no time to tell you. Tom Gillard's shallop is making for the open sea, and this is the only ship in harbor able to catch her. There are Spaniards aboard that shallop who must be captured, alive! We sail, Dick."

"Frank, thou'rt mad! The Queen's business—"

"'Tis the Queen's business upon which we sail! Nay, I'll brook no pause! Step out on deck and—"

"The treasure! Thou'rt striving to take it to France!"

"Fool! I could have done that earlier, without ever returning to England with it, an I'd so wished! I tell thee, Dick, we chase that shallop. Come!"

"Nay, I'll not permit such folly. I'll not—"

The Captain whipped out a pistol. It was not loaded, but the Sheriff didn't

know this, and neither did Katherine Abergavenny.

The Sheriff said nothing. His mouth fell open, and his eyes grew large, his whole body stiffened.

"I'm not to be stopped, Dick, even by a Queen's Sheriff. Unstrap that sword-belt."

A moment later he was following the Sheriff out to the deck—following him close, with the pistol pressed against the small of the Sheriff's back. And Katherine heard him saying: "I'll take the swords of your men, too, since these are the only weapons thy diligence hath left us here."

A FEW moments after this, Katherine, still standing in the cabin as if stunned, heard the shrilling of a whistle, then Captain Drake's voice:

"Yonkers aloft! At the bow, bring the cable to the capstern and break out the anchor! *Yonkers!* Let fall the foresail, spread the sprit! Let fall the mainsail! Forward, bring over that shank painter and cat the anchor! Hil Are ye lame? Aloft, bonnets and dablers!"

El Draque, the Dragon, was in motion. Katherine rose, bewildered, frightened. The door opened, and Talbot Slanning came into the cabin. . . .

The shallop *Gillard's Pride* owed her reputation for speed less to rig and canvas, of which she carried but little, than to her narrow beam, her lightness, her sweet sailing qualities. She could yaw at amazing angles, though she was a difficult craft to handle except in perfect weather. Were it not for the sharply steeved bowsprit, her prow would have resembled that of a galley, and it was much too low to permit the use of a spritsail. She carried no topsails, and her foresail and mainsail were not large. Her mizzen was lateen rigged.

She resembled an old pirate galley, indeed, in more ways than one. For example, her lightness and narrow beam made cannon inadvisable, and she carried, in addition to a few hand pieces, only two stern sakers and a falconet forward. Gillard relied upon her speed, her sailing qualities, and the ferocity of her crew in boarding.

"We'll overhaul before dark," Captain Drake predicted. "'Twill be buckier when we're past Redding Point, and mayhap 'twill wet our spritsail, but that will make the handling harder for Tom Gillard." He roared down the deck: "Yonkers below! Lace those dablers

tighter! I'll have every inch of spread we carry!"

Mariners were coiling the anchor cable, stowing the ship's boat, running up pennants, tightening leech-lines. Not a one stopped to ask what all this was about. Two Queen's commissioners and three sheriffs had been overpowered and disarmed, and the ship was sailing in direct violation of royal command; but the mariners, knowing all this, trusted Frank Drake. They had been away from their homes fourteen months, and had passed through unbelievable hardships; and when they'd returned they were not even permitted to go ashore or to receive visitors: within very sight of their sweethearts and their families, they'd been obliged to remain on board, trusting blindly to the Captain. Now the Captain was roaring commands from the poop, and again they were headed fair toward the open sea—for what? And where? They did not know. But they did as they were told.

"Thinkest a man like Tom Gillard will strike without resistance, Frank? Thinkest not we'll have to fight?"

"Oho! We'll fight! Be sure of that!"

Oxenham asked quietly: "With what?"

"Eh?"

"With what weapons? Whilst thou wert at Powderham, Frank, the sheriff ordered all gunpowder and side arms ashore. Must we prevail over this mess of Channel scum with naught but our good Devonshire fists?"

CAPTAIN DRAKE showed no astonishment at this news.

"It may be Tom Gillard does not know this."

"Ah, but he does know it," Oxenham replied. "Everybody in Plymouth knows it, for that the taking of the arms ashore caused great talk. Hundreds watched."

"Eh, well. . . . There's my sword, and Talbot's, together with the daggers. And there are four rapiers we took from the Sheriff and his men. There are the capstern bars, and we can tear down the partition in the forecabin for the making of clubs. Besides, shouldst never forget, John," he added, "that God is on our side."

"Aye."

"And also there's Talbot's skill. Thou knowest as well as me, John, that with a rapier Talbot Slanning's the worst of any four."

He looked around.

"But where makes Talbot, eh?"

"In your cabin. You sent him there for something."

The Captain nodded, remembering. "Ah, yes." There had been a woman in the cabin—a curious thing, for he never permitted women aboard his ships except for ceremonial occasions. He'd had no time for asking about her; and not until later, on the poop with the ship already under way, did he remember her. He'd sent Talbot to learn who she was.

"Shall I after him?"

"Nay, I'll after him myself. Linger here and watch that none lags."

ON the way to his own cabin, he stopped before the trussed-up Sheriffs and Commissioners.

"There'll be battle soon. I'll have you removed for safety."

The Sheriff said gravely: "You'll regret this, Frank, for the rest of your life."

And the Captain shrugged.

"If I must needs regret it," he said coolly, "then methinks the rest of my life will not be a long time, anyway."

He had not known what to expect when he entered his own cabin a moment later, but surely not the sight of Talbot Slanning, glum and silent, with feet spread, frowning at the floor, while there faced him one of the most startling beauties it ever had been Francis Drake's privilege to see. The girl was tallish, supple of build, with dark brown hair and hazel eyes that were filled with seriousness.

Captain Drake bowed deeply before her. He knew at a glance that she was a lady; and he rather prided himself upon his bow, practiced many long hours in this very cabin.

Talbot said suddenly: "Frank, we must turn back!"

"Art mad? There's a fair full wind, and near the Bolts the sea'll be rough enough so that Gillard will not dare to make many yaws with that crotchety craft. He's half caught already!"

"We must go back," Talbot repeated. He motioned toward the girl. "This—this is my betrothed, Frank—Miss Katherine Abergavenny of Abergavenny Manor. I've caused her overmuch trouble already, and I'll not be taking her into the fight we'd have ahead of us if we overhaul Tom Gillard."

The Captain bowed again at the mention of Katherine's name. He had heard of her, knew her lineage.

"At the very least," Talbot pursued, "Katherine must be put ashore at Stoke Point or thereabouts."

The Captain said quietly: "An we did that, Talbot, the Spaniards would escape with the coming of night."

"Then they must escape. My betrothed must not—"

Katherine Abergavenny cut in: "You speak much of your betrothed. Think ye she remains the betrothed of one who's running from a fight?"

Talbot swallowed hard, staring at her. He'd never heard her speak like this. Her voice was icy, slow, precise.

"The lady says well," Francis Drake ventured.

Talbot wheeled upon him. Talbot was the court ruffler again, an angry man with hand on sword-hilt.

"Nay, no man shall call me a coward!"

The Captain put his hand on Talbot's right arm. He said softly: "My friend—my friend."

Katherine's voice remained as cold as before.

"Must ye brawl in my presence also, in a try to assert your poor manhood? Must you learn politeness as well as courage from your admiral?" She addressed herself to Drake, and her voice softened. "I have heard much of Francis Drake, and that he is a valiant admiral and a gentleman. No fool, too, I've heard. So there'll be fighting?"

"Aye, there will be fighting, ma'am."

Katherine's head was high.

"And where best could I view it?"

The Captain glanced once, very briefly, at Talbot, who stood taut, red, his whole body trembling. For an instant the Captain was almost afraid of this man. He'd seen him fight. Then the Captain looked again at Katherine Abergavenny.

"Methinks the poop-deck, ma'am. 'Tis higher."

"My thanks to you, sir."

She dropped him a curtsy, and went out.

The two men faced one another.

WHEN Captain Drake broke the silence, the voice which had sent tough seamen flying was amazingly soft.

"Talbot lad, thou'rt a fool. For she's right. The business we make now is the Queen's and England's, and 'tis not the time for private notions of honor. Nobody ever called thee a coward, not even Mistress Abergavenny, who tried but to

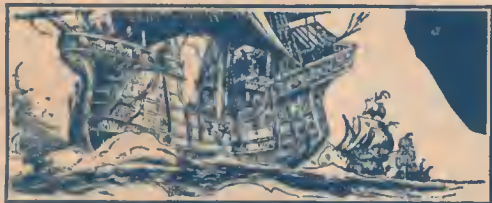
taunt you out of your silliness. Not a coward, no. But a fool."

Abruptly he fell to his knees and started to pray. He prayed for Talbot, for Katherine, and for the safety of the Queen's Majesty.

Talbot was thinking wildly: "I never turned from danger when danger was only mine. But God, oh my God, if Katherine should be hurt!"

The voice continued, sure, firm, yet humble. Awkwardly Talbot got to his own knees, bowed his own head. And after a time the voice ceased. Talbot did not look up. He heard the Captain rise, felt a hand upon his shoulder.

"'Twill be thine own fight, Talbot, for I appoint thee now to command the attack. Pray, lad. Pray for the help of the Lord God of Hosts. Afterward go to the deck, buss thy betrothed, then draw sword and fight like the devil!"



CHAPTER XII

THE wind held, and they rode firm and free very close to Staddon Point. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, though the sea was increasingly rough. It was late afternoon.

"Three full hours of daylight," Tom Moone muttered.

Talbot came out of the cabin, blinking a little. Katherine Abergavenny stood at the rail near him, her face turned away.

Dead ahead, flying like a thing frightened, was the *Gillard's Pride*.

It gave Talbot a start to see how very close they were to the *Gillard's Pride*. Scarcely more than a mile away, and pulling nearer all the time.

He came up behind Katherine and said hesitatingly:

"I—I'm sorry. Only it had seemed to me that perchance thou mightst be hurt, and so I—"

She turned, and he saw that she'd been weeping.

"Because I do love thee so, my sweet!"

She made a curious little sound in her throat, and without any hesitation or shame threw both arms around his neck. "Oh, Talbot!"

Somewhere in the lower shrouds a seaman snickered. Francis Drake blew his whistle.

"Lace that bonnet tighter, ye beef-witted clod! There'll be time enough for entertainment when we get ashore!"

Presently Talbot stood before the Captain again. Half playfully, half seriously, he touched his hat.

"Your worship?"

"Eh?"

"A duty for me?"

"Nay, I've appointed to thee a duty. I'll overhaul yonder vessel, and thou'lt see that she's taken. All the men are at thy command for this."

Talbot bounded to the waist. He felt as he'd felt before, in the Americas, when a rare fight was threatening; he laughed as he moved, laughed as he issued orders.

The screens in the waist were fixed to his satisfaction, and water-barrels and sand-buckets stood everywhere. Since there could be so few members of the crew actually engaged in combat, because there were so few weapons, he had more men to work with in the arrangement of the prosaic details. The sturdy little *El Draque* could not have been better prepared for battle had she been about to face the whole Spanish fleet.

Nobody was permitted aloft, but yonkers were stationed behind the protection of the screens with extra lines for the hasty mending of rig. The six-armed grapple at the bowsprit was sharpened; also grappling-rope and irons were brought to all starboard parts of the vessel.

"We'll take them head-on, and swing broadside starboard," Talbot decided. "Canst manage that, Frank?"

England's greatest admiral touched his hat.

"It will be done, sir."

ABOARD the *Gillard's Pride* a saker coughed white smoke, and a ball whistled athwart *El Draque's* bows.

The other saker coughed, and part of the port rail was carried away at the bow, spewing a shower of angry splinters. No one was hurt. Talbot had long before ordered everybody off the forward deck—except himself.

"She'll speak angrier than that before she gives us a worry," he laughed.

The distance now was scarcely three hundred yards. Talbot could see men reloading the sakers, while other men brought the falconet aft. He caught

sight of torches being carried to the tiny fighting tower. Fire-arrows.

"Yonkers aloft!" he roared over his left shoulder. "Aloft with water! Wet every line!"

A ball shrieked past his head. He smiled, and quietly descended to the waist. It was time for even him to get under cover. He went to the Captain.

"Can we furl yet?"

The Captain shook his head.

"She'll try some tricks. She's caught, but she'll try to dodge until darkness. We need every inch of it."

"'Tis fire I feared," Talbot explained. "Send word to me when we can furl." He raised his head, blew a whistle. "Yonkers below! Refill the water-barrels!"

He saw Tom Gillard on the after deck of the shallop, and even above the clamor of voices he was able to hear Gillard's commands. He turned. Behind him, high on the poop, Katherine Abergavenny was leaning forward, her hair blowing, her cheeks bright red in the breeze. When she caught his eye she waved and smiled.

The *Gillard's Pride* endeavored to yaw, but the persistent fregata followed the movement. Gillard tried another yaw, to starboard, and this time he went too far. The shallop rocked and shivered like a wounded beast; a sea broke over her, carrying away the lantheen.

El Draque came around more slowly. Francis Drake was not to be shaken off by tricks.

"Heed the forward rigging!"

Wooden-feathered bolts with forked heads were whistling above, and *El Draque's* shrouds were being cut. A yardarm swung crazily apeak. The main topsail flapped and snapped in impotent protest and appeared to be trying to recover its balance. Rope-ends fell thuddingly to the deck.

Aboard the *Gillard's Pride* men were stuffing oil-soaked rags in the tri-spaces of their fire-arrows, igniting them at the cresset which flamed and sputtered there, and shooting them. They hissed furiously through the air, black smoke trailing them, and thunked into the deck of the fregata, into the rails, into the masts and yards. Sailors were everywhere spilling water and throwing sand.

SUDDENLY everything became quiet. Each man, as though he understood what was happening, ceased his yells, trussed up his points, made ready.

The *Gillard's Pride* had striven too hard to wriggle away. Her smashed mizzen prevented Tom Gillard from bringing her about to meet the attack full-on. Now she floundered. And *El Draque's* prow moved relentlessly to catch her on the starboard quarter. Francis Drake, having obeyed orders, quit the tiller, and as he drew sword and ran for the waist, his voice boomed across the empty ocean:

"Take the ship, Master Slanning!"

TALBOT was ready. Six swords with daggers, four capstern-bars, an array of improvised clubs. But he knew his men. These were the same men who had been lost to panic on a rainy dawn in *Nombre de Dios*, but since that time they'd learned to fight. He glanced around, smiling. The men were silent, expressionless, as they watched the vessels come closer.

From the poop-deck Katherine Abergavenny waved to him, and he waved his rapier in reply.

The crash was terrific. It seemed for an instant as though the shallop would be cut fairly in two. The six long spikes of the *Dragon's* grapnel thundered and screeched through her deck cabin amidships, carried away a long portion of her rail, and sent her crew scrambling back to safety. Timbers made hideous protest. Captain Drake roared a command to the seaman at the tiller, and the fregata was swung neatly, confidently, stern to larboard. Her waist edged against the violated decks of the *Gillard's Pride*.

Talbot called: "Hooks! Hooks and chains!"

Somebody fired a musket. One of the sakers coughed yet again. A man near Talbot turned around twice, knelt on the deck, and then quietly collapsed, half rolling over on his back. There was a startled, somewhat puzzled expression on his face, and blood leaped from his mouth. Another seaman instantly seized this fellow's capstern-bar, for Talbot had arranged an unarmed but alert reserve.

"Hooks! Hooks!"

The grappling hooks were thrown, not in a shower but now by a man at one end of the waist, now by a man at the other, then by a man in the middle. Muskets banged from the forward deck of the *Gillard's Pride*. The men in the fighting tower, which had sagged under the shock, continued desperately to rain down bolts and quarrels.

The grappling chains were drawn. The vessels ground and shrieked together, screaming as though in horrid pain.

They showed alone upon a rough but not unfriendly sea, these vessels. They rose and shudderingly fell, while a hazy blue sky, close and cloudless, watched serenely. The wind had hushed itself almost into silence; and far to the north, England was a gray-purple smear.

"Boarders!" Talbot sprang from behind the protection of the fighting screen. "Boarders, follow me!"

He jumped to the deck of the shallop.

Because the Spanish fregata was so low in the water, her waist was about on a level with the overall decks of the shallop. However, she had a beamy tumble-down—for in spite of the bow grapnel, she'd been designed as a stand-off battler—so that the rails of the two vessels were not in contact. The distance was about five feet. Talbot fell to one knee, and put his right fist to the deck to recover his balance. He parried a cutlass-blow with his cinquedeas as he did so, and an instant later he was on his feet. The man with the cutlass backed away.

Talbot slipped past a lance, bending his knees. The rapier licked in and out—and there was no lance there.

The man with the cutlass, reinforced by two companions similarly armed, stepped forward again. For a moment Talbot could do nothing but hold them off, parrying with both blades. Then he felt the Captain by his side, and another rapier flashed with his.

There was little room for swordplay here among the massed wreckage of the cabin, for the long angry splinters of wood were as dangerous as any steel weapons. They pushed forward, step by slow step. They did not dare turn their heads even to learn whether the others were making the jump.

AS the space broadened, more men were able to dispute passage to a clear deck. One of them came in too recklessly, and Talbot's rapier slipped between his ribs. The fellow fell, but fell forward; and as he did so, he grabbed one of Francis Drake's ankles. The Captain lurched heavily against Talbot, who was pushed against the wall of the cabin.

This threw his rapier out of line, and Gillard's men sprang in.

Talbot was perfectly cool about it. He never had enjoyed a fight so much.

His palm was out, his blade in the high line, as though it were a saber. The place rang like a blacksmith's shop. Captain Drake was down.

At least one of the blows in that rush carried past Talbot's guard, for suddenly he knew that he'd dropped his cinquedeas, that his left arm was useless: he had no feeling in the arm.

He brought his right shoulder forward, and his right foot. He advanced warily. The grip of his sword was almost motionless, but the point whisked back and forth in tiny dangerous arcs. The point slashed a cheek, threatening an eye, silently clipped a nose up the middle. . . . Talbot did not dare to move in for a full cut or thrust, but he knew the value of threatening an antagonist's face.

Gillard's men wavered. Talbot continued to move forward, keen, catlike, his point never still.

The Captain was up again, and his rapier flashed on Talbot's left. Somebody else had stepped up on Talbot's right: Talbot could not move his eyes to see who this was, but from the shortness of the reach he guessed it to be Ellis Hixom, a stumpy fellow.

FROM the afterdeck Tom Gillard's voice came:

"Away, blades! Aloft! Aloft!"

Talbot sensed the trick. With a pause in the resistance, these outnumbered boarders naturally would stop for a moment to settle their position, catch their breath. But when the defenders stepped back, the bowmen above would have clear targets.

So Talbot didn't pause.

"Ware the arrows! 'Ware above!"

A sailor, startled at the pursuit, turned, raising his blade. Then he decided not to stand, but to flee. But this decision was a tardy one. Talbot's blade, swift as light, flashed past his guard and slid into the softness of his throat; the sailor's head plopped forward as though he'd been struck from behind, and he fell with a crash to his knees; he swayed there a moment, grotesquely upright, a caricature of a man at prayer; then he toppled sideways, and was still.

"The mast! To the mast!"

A quarrel clanged upon Talbot's morion. He reached the mainmast but a scant leap ahead of Hixom and Captain Drake. Stout Tom Moone, bellowing with excitement, his face bloody, charged through a rain of arrows and quarrels,

and incredibly was untouched when he reached the shelter of the mast.

For when they were close to this mast, they were directly underneath the bowmen in the fighting tower, and so they were not targets.

John Oxenham was lying near the rail, cursing in a peevish voice while he tugged at an arrow which was sunk into his side to the feathering. The sixth swordsman was Harry Coppledick, a cousin of the bully whose shoulder Talbot had broken. Harry had never even reached the *Gillard's Pride*, but had been killed by a musket-ball while making the leap, and had fallen into the sea—sword and all.

The rest of *El Draque's* crew, armed only with clubs, and some of them not armed at all, did not dare to venture from behind the fighting screens.

"Well, we're four here," Captain Drake said. "Enough men to take any ship, so that God is with them, eh?" He turned to Talbot. "What now, sir?"

Talbot did not answer immediately. He was studying the situation. Four motionless mariners marked the path of these four swordsmen from rail to mainmast. There were ten more near by, gripping cutlasses and pikes, screwing up their courage for a rush. Despite the odds, Talbot had considerable hope. These men were Channel pirates, great fellows for boarding, magnificent when they charged, but not so good in defense. To be attacked was a new sensation for them, and they were frightened.

Directly above were ten or twelve archers, and the four men from *El Draque* were marooned in a little island of safety—of temporary safety. The archers were shooting at the rail fighters now, to prevent further boarding.

BACK on the afterdeck, clearly visible despite the gathering darkness, was Thomas Carew Gillard. He had taken no part in the fighting—a fact which for a time puzzled Talbot, who knew that Tom Gillard, whatever else he might be, was no coward. Then Talbot saw Gillard's companions, and understood. One was a tall, stiff Spaniard, who stared disdainfully, without any show of excitement, at the fighting. The other was Rat-face. These were the men Talbot and Captain Drake had come to take, and Gillard knew this. Gillard would remain close to these men. As a last resort, if the battle went against him, he would kill them.

Talbot was convinced of this.

Gillard roared: "On at them, ye goose-livered clods!"

The mariners charged again, before Talbot was able to reach a decision, and for a few minutes there was no time for anything but fighting.

Ellis Hixom was brought to his knees; he leaned with one shoulder against the mast, moaning.

Talbot's left arm was cut twice again, because he forgot for a moment that he no longer had any defence there, and exposed the arm by facing an antagonist squarely. He was still laughing, still felt incalculably strong.

Above the shouts, the shuffling of feet, the grunts, the squeals of pain, the clang and scrape of bare steel, he could hear Tom Gillard roaring commands to other sailors to cut loose the two vessels. He could hear axes thunking into the base of *El Draque's* bow grapnel.

HE wished he dared glance at Katherine. But even without the fighting, he would have had little chance for this; for the shallop was tossing now in rising seas. The *Gillard's Pride*, in fact, was in a bad way, and Tom Gillard's command to cut her loose from *El Draque* had been more than a battle order. *El Draque*, being the heavier vessel, with a much greater spread of canvas, was able to ride with the wind, pushing the shallop ahead of her, so that the *Gillard's Pride*, half turned, was taking the seas almost broadside. The *Gillard's Pride* never had been a handy vessel in dirty weather. Now she was thumped and battered unmercifully, and the man at her tiller was powerless to prevent this.

She lurched free of the fregata when the grapnel was chopped through, but a heavy sea whirled her madly, stood her almost on end. Talbot, together with most of the others aboard, was thrown flat upon the deck. He was scrambling to his feet, still clutching his rapier, when some instinct warned him to look aloft. One look—and he threw himself upon the deck again, covering his head with his arms.

The mainmast made a shrill, dry sound when it split, but it struck the deck like a crash of thunder. The shallop lunged wildly to starboard, and Talbot slid along the rough pine boards, scratching his face and hands, tearing his clothes. He struck a rail, got to one knee, stared around.

The fighting tower, a rickety, overcrowded structure at best, had been plunged into the sea with all its archers. Tom Moone lay moaning, white with pain, his left ankle broken. Ellis Hixom was a crumpled heap against the stump of the mast; a splinter the size of a lance had been driven deep into his right shoulder. The mast itself was gone—and so were at least six of the deck-hands. Captain Drake was on his knees, struggling to regain his feet. A hundred yards or so away, untouched by the mast, floated *El Draque*.

Talbot ran for the afterdeck. He had seen Tom Gillard draw his dagger; and he knew what Gillard was going to do.

Nobody made any attempt to stop Talbot. The sailors were confused, badly frightened. They had had more than enough of fighting.

Tom Gillard's left arm went up. It looked, from where Talbot was running, as though he'd given the tall Spaniard a hearty thump between the shoulder-blades. The Spaniard, still stiff, rigid, fell forward on his face. A lurch of the vessel rolled him into the scuppers. Gillard wheeled upon Rat-face, who shrank away.

Talbot yelled: "Stop! You will live!"

Either Rat-face didn't understand the English, or else he was too badly scared to hear anything at all, or to know anything except the fact that Captain Gillard was about to kill him. He was staring at Gillard as though fascinated. He stumbled backward, struck the rail.

Talbot yelled: "Run this way!"

Gillard leaped. Rat-face, screaming, scabbled over the rail and into the sea.

Captain Drake ran past Talbot. "We must have that man!" He leaped head-first over the rail after Rat-face, dropping his sword; he never even touched the rail.

And Talbot confronted Thomas Carrew Gillard.

GILLARD smiled slowly, and slowly nodded.

"You come too late, messenger-boy."

Talbot said: "Not too late to kill you."

The light was poor. The afterdeck rose and fell as the shallop, out of all control, pitched wildly; and seas ankle-deep sluiced across the *Gillard's Pride*. However, the afterdeck was comparatively clear of tackle and rope-coils and wreckage from the smashed cabin. And nobody disturbed them as they fought. For all they themselves knew, or cared,

they might have been the only two men in the world.

They did not hear the crackling of the timbers, either. Yet they knew that the shallop was afire; for presently their figures showed red in the failing light, and their blades became like stiffened strips of flame.

THE cresset from which the archers ignited their fire-arrows had fallen directly upon the wreckage of the cabin, which still was dry. The *Gillard's Pride* blazed eagerly, almost gleefully, as though she'd long awaited this opportunity to quit the world.

Talbot said: "For William Abergavenny!" He went in low, turning his wrist, cutting up. The end of his blade slipped soundlessly, effortlessly, up Tom Gillard's right cheek, and removed a goodly portion of Gillard's ear.

Gillard did not even seem to be aware of this. He was utterly silent, utterly savage. Mercilessly he played for Talbot's left flank, for he had perceived that Talbot's left arm was hanging useless.

Talbot stood with his right foot far forward, his right shoulder advanced. He made no side-steps.

He cried: "For Robin Butterwalk, murderer!" Abruptly the left side of Gillard's face was opened from chin to ear. Gillard's whole face was bloody now in the dancing light of the flames, and blood spattered over his doublet and hose.

The sun was setting, unnoticed, ignored. It made the sea an angry, sullen red, the sky a smoky, darker crimson. But this was a dying light, a far light. The glare of the fire aboard the *Gillard's Pride* was much more immediate, more real, livelier; the flames crackled and spat in malicious glee, and threw a restless, giddy scarlet upon the evening air.

Presently Talbot began again to laugh. He knew that he was the better swordsman, and that in spite of the heaving deck, the wet boards, the uncertain light, in spite of his wounded left arm also, he would kill Tom Gillard very soon.

Gillard knew it too. Talbot could read this in Gillard's eyes.

"The next will be for me," Talbot laughed.

Gillard dropped into a deep lunge, thrusting straight. It was the last desperate trick of a gambler. He had been plying the edge exclusively, but now he turned Talbot's own technic against him.

It was a starkly simple attack, very swift, absolutely unexpected.

Almost it succeeded. Talbot caught the blade barely in time, lifting it, felt it slither along his own blade as he straightened his right arm. . . .

Tom Gillard went flat upon his face without a sound, but with such force that the sword was wrenched out of Talbot's grip and slammed upon the deck underneath Gillard. Above, glittering in the mad little scarlet lights of the fire, the sword stuck a full five inches out of Tom Gillard's back. It had gone directly through Tom Gillard's heart.

Talbot was not laughing now. He felt very weak, and a little sick. A little frightened, too, for the first time. He sat down upon the deck and held his head in his hands. A pitch of the ship threw him backward, rolled him into the scuppers, and he found himself all but kneeling upon the figure of the tall Spaniard who'd been stabbed in the back. A corpse coming to life? Talbot gasped. For the eyes were open and wildly staring, and the lips moved.

Talbot rose, yelling in his excitement.

"He's alive! He's still alive!"

From the starboard rail a few feet away came Francis Drake's voice: "So is this one." The Captain's head appeared. He was panting, coughing, laboring to drag something after him as he struggled out of the water and over the rail. Talbot ran to his assistance.

"Aye, this one too!"

Rat-face was very wet, thoroughly frightened, and breathless; but decidedly he was alive. They hauled him over the rail, threw him upon the deck.

ALL fight had gone out of the sailors of the *Gillard's Pride*. They were crowded in the bow, throwing their weapons into the sea, frantically waving and shouting for the fregata to come and take them off.

El Draque moved in cautiously until her crippled grapnel-arm ground against the bow of the sinking shallop. Talbot could see Katherine Abergavenny on the poop-deck; she was waving both her arms.

The men were throwing grappling hooks and nets, and the mariners of the *Gillard's Pride* scrambled eagerly to safety.

There was a mass of roaring flames between that safety and the afterdeck of the shallop. Francis Drake tore long strips from his own wet doublet, and with these he and Talbot bound their faces and the faces of the two Spaniards. Talbot took the tall Spaniard over his back. Captain Drake took Rat-face.

The corpse of Thomas Carew Gillard showed red in the light of the flames, with the end of Talbot's rapier still sticking out of its back.

THE tall Spaniard, whose name was Don Jesus Maria de Bazan, died—but not before he had first muttered a confession of the whole assassination-plot—which confession was witnessed not only by the principal officers and gentlemen of *El Draque*, but also by the High Sheriff of Devonshire, his deputies, and the two Queen's Commissioners.

Rat-face likewise had confessed, without the slightest coercion. And his confession too had been well and properly witnessed.

"And now," said Francis Drake, "methinks it would be seemly if we fell to our knees and offered up a prayer to Almighty God, by Whose grace we have won through these perils."

Talbot knelt beside Katherine Abergavenny, very close to her, and kept his eyes open while the Captain prayed: he watched the last far flickers of red light which came through the cabin windows and were sprayed across the cabin floor. Astern, surrounded by a black and red sea, the *Gillard's Pride* was burning herself out in a last hissing spasm—her owner's funeral pyre, soon to disappear.

"I'll grant you the success, Frank," the High Sheriff grunted, as he rose from his knees. "But 'twas a mighty wager to place upon one cast."

"Ah, but the reward, Dick!"

"Oh, thou'lt win a pardon of it."

"Pardon? Nay, I'll win far more than that! I'll win the Queen's Majesty's permission to sail another sea. For this treasure's naught, which we carry now, eh, Talbot? The greatest treasure is yet to be won."

Talbot had his arm around Katherine Abergavenny, and now he drew her a little closer to him. He smiled.

"Nay, the greatest treasure, for me, is won already."

THE END.

Another book-length novel of exceptional interest, "War in His Pocket," by Charles Bennett, will be a feature of the next (the November) issue.

REAL EXPERIENCES

For details of our prize offer for these true stories of adventure,
see page 3.



Quank and Mapipi

A famous naturalist plays Tarzan and falls into serious danger.

By IVAN SANDERSON

CAPRIATA—our bushman guide—stopped dead in his tracks and listened intently; I discerned nothing, but gradually became aware of a noise that I can only describe as a gentle wailing, which emanated from a dense patch of palms and tancias at the base of the ravine.

"Quank," Capriata whispered, but this didn't help much, because I had not then been in the country long enough to have learned the native names of animals.

"What do they look like?" I asked.

"Sssh!" he warned. "They are very clever."

"Shall I go and get the gun?" I volunteered.

"Yes, please sir; I will watch them."

So I bolted back to camp, and when I returned the animals were making more noise than before. Capriata had bent or

broken a number of small twigs, and following these more by guesswork than any tracking ability, I presently spotted them perched on a great rock that jutted out over the towering wall of the ravine. I crept up and handed him the gun.

"I can't see them," I whispered. "I shouldn't know one if I did."

"I think they're moving down the valley," he said. "Please go round the top of the valley, sir."

So I went away down-wind along the edge of the ravine as fast as I could, but still completely mystified as to what I was stalking.

Descending the ravine, I came to the stream. The vivid trees formed a perfect arch overhead through which the brilliant sunlight filtered down upon the banks of shining palms and a riot of tangled leaves of every shape and size. The water trick-

ling and gushing between the great boulders was clearer than any crystal that I have seen, and as I knelt to drink, a whole flock or flight, or whatever it may be, of very large hummingbirds of more color combinations than I had believed existed even among birds came flying into the sunlight. They whirled and buzzed first here, then there, before a mass of waxy white flowers that dropped their beautiful orange-tongued mouths toward the water. Flashes of metallic gold and copper, brilliantly lighted tails forked like swallows', shimmered green and blue and purple before my eyes as the birds changed their position from one place to another.

Drunk with all this water and conglomeration of color, I stumbled on once more into the tangle of natural barbed-wire. There was no sign nor sound of either Capriata or the animals for whose benefit all this maneuvering was taking place; they were more than half a mile upwind down the valley. I struggled on, but the opposite side of the ravine was much steeper and even more densely covered with vegetation, so that one could hardly force a passage through the stems, let alone avoid the thorns or making a noise. To get over this difficulty, and because I presumed even quank, whatever they might be, would not remain forever on the same feeding-ground, I mounted to the top of the ridge where the forest was more open.

I began peering under the trees whose bushy heads were level with where I stood, for their trunks sprouted from the bottom of the ravine. I could hear from below the same indistinct wailings and mumblings that we had heard from the other side.

What was to be done?

I came eventually to the conclusion that my own person was probably the best thing to drop down among the unsuspecting animals. This was possible despite the cliff, because there was an immense tree growing at the brink from which a cascade of ropelike creepers of all thicknesses depended into the ravine.

Tarzan's behavior is not fantastic at all, and is of everyday occurrence to a zoölogist in some forests. I pushed the machete into my belt, leaned out and grasped three suitable creepers, all as supple as flax ropes, and then took to the air. Admittedly I had a moment of disbelief as I swung out over the ravine and a clump of healthy cocorite palms, but I began to lower myself cautiously.

About ten feet down I came face to face with something that made me forget the quank. Hanging beneath a ledge, level with my face, was a sleeping bat, wrapped in its clammy wings and with a pale fawn-colored head bearing four bright yellow stripes. This was a new one to me; and twining both my legs round the creepers, I fished in my pockets for a handkerchief. With this I reached out for the bat. I had caught it without getting bitten, and was knotting it in the handkerchief, when things above began to give way.

Instinctively I held to the remaining creepers while a shower of fair-sized logs shot past me at rapid speed. Then a seemingly endless coil of liana rope descended on me, enveloping me and all but knocking me off and out, to put it concisely. Various things held, however, including myself, though only for a few seconds; then we all began to go slowly but relentlessly downward, and it seemed a very long way down those creepers. Some splinters or thorns entered my hands near the beginning of the descent, worked through and came out the other side, upon my arrival at the ends of the creepers, which were still several feet above the ground. The bat left me, and the machete left me, but the broken liana clung on desperately. I arrived among the boulders at the bottom with something approaching the maximum velocity of gravitational pull at the surface of the earth. I think one's mind and perception must be greatly sharpened by sudden motion with a pronounced downward trend. On this occasion, it gave me a momentary vision of a group of greatly startled animals gazing up through a latticework of green leaves; they imprinted themselves on my mind as vividly as a picture on the film of a candid camera. They were black and of varying sizes, with small eyes and rudely pointed noses. They were peccaries—and a species built for racing, judging by their slender graceful lines. The larger ones had immaculate white collars. So much I saw; then I struck the earth.

WHAT a nuisance to have to describe things in words—they are so slow and events were so swift! If only I could give you one of those well-regulated motion pictures of what happened! But that is impossible, because the camera was lying in camp, as it always is when some genuine action takes place. I landed hard, but not so hard as I would have had

I not been completely enveloped in yard upon yard of supple creeper. This stuff can bend, but not so much as a rope of similar thickness, and therefore a coil of it is of some diameter and resilience. When the mental fog cleared,—which it did rapidly,—I found that I had fallen into a sort of natural loose-box, bounded by ridges of rock on two sides, and the cliff face behind. In front was a serried rank of balise stems.

I rolled over to try and extricate myself, and perceived the machete lying within easy grasp; but as I reached out, something else began to move toward the handle. It was a snake beautifully banded with cinnamon and dark brown. We saw each other at the same instant; we both recoiled.

Now, I cannot honestly pretend that I am frightened of snakes. They are creatures to be treated with suspicion and the resultant caution, but I don't find them so loathsome as spiders and their ilk. One glance at this example was, however, quite sufficient to identify him with the descriptions given by sundry local people of the dread *Mapipi*.

The mapipi is the southern representative of the rattler, but in Trinidad it has an even more exciting reputation than its rival in the North. Most of the tales concerning it are doubtless greatly exaggerated or frankly untrue, owing to its being one of the few deadly species in a land that is poorly provided with such invigorating types. I will always contend that a few creatures with the power of life and death over man are a great asset to a country; they keep the natives alive to the fact that they are not utter gods. I had, nevertheless, been suitably impressed by the history of a man who had been struck by a mapipi and thrown twelve feet through the contraction of his muscles with the sudden pain, and also by the disquieting belief that once hit, one is paralyzed, although not dead, and that ants and worms set to work on one's carcass without further ado.

The recollection of these fantastic stories prompted me to let out a howl for the efficient *Capriata*. I was dismayed therefore when no response came, and the snake took my behavior as a personal affront. Without warning he lunged at me, and I don't quite know how I got out of the way. Then began a most grueling time; there was something very persistent about that snake, and I would like to know how often a snake will really stand its ground in such a manner.

He lunged again and again, and I almost laughed at the dim memories of those veranda guides to the tropics who blithely tell newcomers that a snake gets tired of striking. This little devil was only just twenty inches long, we discovered later, but he was angry and filled with energy. I soon saw he was deliberately out to get me; and wrapped as I was in those coils of steel-strong liana, it became a very uneven fight. I couldn't hit back even if I had wanted to, and at first I didn't, though the brute really got my blood up in the end. It may seem impossible, but I had to force myself to think of how to run away! This takes long to tell, but I can assure you it didn't take long to happen, especially after the mapipi had struck and hit one of the coils of creeper which happened to be coming up toward him.

FOR a moment I thought its fangs had caught in the juicy wood; but the liana, seemingly as animated as a snake itself, flipped up, and the mapipi was flung into the air. I struggled in a frenzy, and the snake landed where I had been a moment before. I think it was at this moment that I realized we were not alone. There was a small quank in the natural enclosure too. Where it had been until then I do not know, but now it started gallivanting round the place, making the proceedings even dizzier. The first I saw of it was a flash which gave me a fright almost as big as the mapipi had. I was lunging one way; now I lunged the other. Part of the rope came free, and I jumped to my feet.

Unbelievable as it may seem, my back was to the snake; the quank charged toward me, being as frightened as anybody; I jumped, and the coils of creeper fell down around my feet so that I sprawled against the rocks. The quank passed under me and kicked the snake with a resounding smack, so that it sailed back against the cliff face; then I at last got free of the creeper and scrambled up onto the pile of rocks. By the time I turned around the quank was gone, and I heard it crashing off through the balises, screaming like a child.

But the mapipi wasn't satisfied yet. He dashed across the bare floor of this natural arena, perhaps even with a view to climbing the rocks after me! I wasn't sure of his ability to do this, and so took no chances, but scrambled up higher. Loosening a small rock, I heaved it with all my might. Of course I missed by

several feet, and this made him all the more angry. Until now the whole affair had in reality taken only a few seconds; the next round was more protracted. I hurled rocks and the snake darted about, sometimes disappearing between stones. Eventually I made a hit, and when I saw my opponent was crippled, chanced a cautious advance and held him down with a big dead branch that was at hand.

At last I had a thin creeper noose round his neck, and then his limp body was dangling on the end of a long stick. I gathered up the bat and the machete and bawled for Capriata. There was no answer, and I bawled again. After this I felt very sick rather suddenly, and had to sit down; we can't all be intrepid and fearless snake-hunters. I remember wondering whether I had been bitten during the fray and jumped up again in a great state; but I searched in vain for signs of a bite. Then I lighted a cigarette.

The place looked like a stockyard. I was bleeding profusely from the scratches I had got when descending the creeper, and this blood had spattered over the rocks, the fallen creeper and my person. It is amazing how blood gets about, and had anybody seen the place then, they would have thought that I had been having it out with a tiger. There was still no Capriata, and I sat in a dazed silence, trying to get things together. . . .

I must put on record that the remainder of that afternoon was much worse, when all things were considered. It appeared from subsequent wanderings that I was nowhere near Capriata, that I was not even in the same ravine, and there is no evidence to show that I even encountered the same sounder of peccaries or quank. How I got so far away I do not know; it seems inconceivable that even so great a fool as I could have been so completely off the track. Perhaps it was that Capriata could not hear my calls because the trees so completely deaden all sounds in the forest.

It was almost dark when I did strike the ravine at the place where we took water, and quite black by the time I reached camp and found my placid companion, who thought I had been out turning over stones for lizards—if you please! Capriata got back half an hour later. He had waited for me and then set out after the quank; failing to meet these, he had started looking for me, and finally for the camp. His jaw dropped at sight of my bloody shirt and bandaged person, but all he said was "Oh-o."

I Make

*A soldier of fortune
blows up a train—with
important results.*

AN almost-panic prevailed in the rebel army. It was their first major battle; and things looked bad.

The revolution of the "Red-flaggers" was young, and a defeat at this time would spell disaster. The year was 1912. The rebels had captured Juarez, Mexico, and advanced in triumph, through the state of Chihuahua with little or no opposition. Pasquale Orosco, the governor of the state of Chihuahua, had joined the rebel forces, and for a time things had looked mighty fine. Sam and I were in charge of the two machine-guns and so had a great responsibility, for the rebels expected us to do most of the fighting.

Our position was in the hills at Rellano, overlooking a flat stretch of desert country, dry and cactus-covered. The Mexican Central Railroad split the hills and disappeared into the distance of the desert toward the city of Torreon. Beyond the hills where our troops were entrenched, the Federals held control.

Out over the desert we could see the smoke of trains. Spies came in on lathered horses and made their reports. Three thousand Federal troops were approaching in three trains to attack our positions. They had cavalry, artillery and plenty of machine-guns. We numbered less than two thousand. Most of our troops were mounted but poorly equipped, and with only one small piece of artillery besides our two machine-guns—a small mountain gun that at best was of doubtful value.

To complicate matters, there was jealousy on the part of a captain, a former Federal officer, who thought he should be in command of the machine-guns and the two Americans. His jealousy had culminated in a little gun-play between him and me in which he had been a bit too slow and I made the mistake of not killing him. He came off second best and retired for the time being, growling threats that neither Sam nor I would ever live to see the end of the first battle. And as he had a force of two hundred men who had deserted the Federal cause with him, it didn't look any too secure for us. But we had no out; we had to go through.

a President

By TRACY RICHARDSON



There was one thing in our favor, and that was of doubtful value. There was a woman soldier, a beautiful black-eyed Mexican girl of twenty-three who was a fighting fool and had two hundred and fifty male followers. She was frankly out to make enough money out of the revolution to permit her to return to her native mountain town and buy a ranch. And she had a decided crush on Sam.

She heard the captain's threats against us, and she said: "If a bullet even comes close to the two Americans,—that is, from the rear,—I'll kill you and all your men. If they die, you die."

SAM and I went into conference with Generals Salazar and Campa, to map out a plan of defense. Campa advocated a wild charge out into the desert to meet the enemy. Salazar was more cautious, realizing that our forces were outnumbered by a foe better equipped and much better trained. The only hope I could see, and I expressed myself, was to stop the troop-trains before they got near enough to use the larger cannon they were reported to have mounted on flat-cars.

"Why," I asked, "didn't you mine the railway tracks and blow up the troop-trains?"

"A good idea," said Salazar with a nod of approval; "but we didn't think of it. It's too late now."

We were holding our conference in a box-car that served as headquarters. On the siding alongside us puffed an old switch engine that had been brought from Chihuahua City to help our trains over the steep grades. As I listened to its puffing, an idea was born.

"General Salazar!" I exclaimed. "I've got it! I know how to stop the troop-trains. At the same time our troops can make the charge, and perhaps we'll get away with it."

Rapidly I explained my plan. We had plenty of dynamite, hundreds of cases. After a few minutes' talk, they got busy, and loaded the explosive onto the front end of the switch engine, covering the lot with hundreds of detonators so there

would be no chance of a miss. Eight hundred pounds of forty-per-cent powder was finally secured in place, and the engine moved slowly to the crest of the hill. From there down onto the desert it was one long grade, all the way to where the Federal trains could be seen in the distance, puffing slowly on, toward us. Through strong field-glasses we could see there was some sort of armored cars being run ahead of the leading engine. On the train, men were tightly packed.

We waited. Orders were sent out to officers to take their men and move down the dry arroyos alongside the track, and be ready to attack at the sound of the explosion. At a word from Salazar the engineer eased open the throttle. As it crossed the hump of the grade, the engine shot away, gaining speed with every turn of the wheels. The engineer tied down the whistle-cord, and jumped to safety.

Even the Mexicans who had not been in on the loading of the dynamite knew something was up, and as the wild thunderbolt streaked forward, its whistle shrieking one shrill continuous peal, they rose to their feet and burst into cheers.

TENSELY we waited. The question was would the Federals realize their danger and attempt to stop the wild engine? Closer and closer it approached the Federal train. At last, it was so close we knew nothing could prevent the wreck. At last also it was evident the Federals realized what was up, but it was too late. Through our glasses we could see the enemy train come to a halt, and men jump down and run into the desert.

The trains met. The engine and the lead Federal cars seemed to rise hundreds of feet into the air. Across the bleakness of the desert there came to our ears a deep bellowing roar that was almost lost amid the wild cheers of the excited rebel soldiers. Mounted rebels started to close in from each side, and we could hear the distant drum of rifle-fire.

But the battle was not over. The two rear troop-trains halted, and men poured down onto the sands. Hastily they

formed in orderly ranks and advanced along the tracks at the double. Others opened up with machine-guns, but they were too far away to be effective. Light field-pieces were firing from the flat-cars, and the shells began to scream over our heads. One lucky shot struck beneath the only field-piece we had, and blew the crew to kingdom-come. Homer Scott, the photographer, was just making a picture of the cannon, and he was blown backward, but instinct guided his finger and he got the picture, even though the lens was blown from his camera.

The Federal infantry came within range of our machine-guns, and Sam and I opened up. Belt after belt we fired. They broke and ran, were reformed and advanced again. Never in my life have I seen a finer example of stark bravery than displayed by those barefooted Indian Federals. But it was all in vain.

They had been bewildered by the explosion that wrecked the troop-train and did not know what would happen next. Finally they broke and retired as fast as they could run, throwing away their rifles and machine-guns in their haste. Our cavalry closed in and completed the defeat. The two remaining Federal troop-trains were blowing their whistles wildly, and every Federal soldier that could, clambered aboard, and they pulled out for the rear. The battle was over.

But what a sight the desert now presented! Sam and I got our horses, and carrying our machine-guns in front of us, rode down to where the wrecked troop-train was scattered over the sands. The dead were everywhere. The train was a mass of twisted steel and wood. The flat-cars had been protected with rows of cross-ties and sand-bags, and these had been a death trap.

CARTS appeared, and the picking up of the dead and of the abandoned supplies began. The bodies of the dead Federals were dumped into an old mine-shaft. A few hundred prisoners were captured. A dozen machine-guns and a few pieces of light artillery were added to our armament. It had been a spectacular victory for the Red-flaggers; Sam and I were riding high on the wave of popularity, and our jealous captain did not dare to raise his hand or voice against us.

The following day spies brought in reports from Torreon that General Salas, the Federal leader, had killed himself over the disgrace of his defeat, and the Federals were on the verge of mutiny.

Over a year later I got another slant on the story of the battle of Rellano. The Red-flag revolution had meanwhile failed miserably. General Huerta had taken the field, and with his heavy artillery had blasted us out of all our positions. Salazar and Campa were loose in the hills but no longer a menace. Then came the death of Madero, and Huerta declared himself President of Mexico. The Red-flaggers, or at least what was left of them, joined forces with the new government, and I was sent by Salazar to Mexico City to carry messages to President Victoriano Huerta.

I FOUND him in a *cantina*, the *Copa de Oro*, sipping his habitual glass of cognac. For several minutes he read the messages in silence, a frown on his face. With menace in his voice he said to me: "So! You are Tracy Richardson, the Red-flagger. I should have you shot. At one time I offered ten thousand pesos for you and the other man, dead or alive." His voice softened somewhat; a humorous twinkle lighted his eyes. Some members of his staff, who had been leaning forward, fingers toying with their pistols, sank back again in their chairs.

"After all," continued President Huerta as he pushed a glass and the bottle of cognac toward me, "if it were not for you, I would not be President of Mexico."

Bewildered, I sat silent for a moment. At a motion from the President I raised my glass with his, and we drank. Then I said: "But General, I don't understand. I fought against you."

Huerta laughed outright, in great good humor, at a joke I did not understand. Then he explained. "In 1912 I was in retirement, too old longer to serve my country in the field. Then you, Señor Richardson, ran an engine loaded with explosives into the troop-train of General Salas, and as a result he destroyed himself. I was called from retirement to take his place. Madero in turn was destroyed to save Mexico; and here I am, Victoriano Huerta, President. And all because of you. You are now a colonel of artillery in the regular forces of the Mexican Army, but I'm going to keep you here in the Capital where I can watch you."

And so he did. I stayed in Mexico City until the American sailors and marines landed in Vera Cruz, and then I managed to make my escape to the coast, again the enemy of the man who claimed I had made him President.

Plane Afire



A tall story? It's a part of probability that improbable things do happen.

By BEN COCHRANE

TWO whole weeks of vacation, and my own plane to fly!

I got to the field about nine-thirty. There was a fine west wind blowing in from the sea—a swell morning for flying. I checked the ship, ran the motor up. Everything worked O.K., so I released the brakes and had started taxiing out on the runway, when the airport manager came out of the hangar and yelled at me. I throttled down and leaned out to hear what he had to say.

"Where yuh goin'?" he blatted.

"Walla Walla, punk!" I bellered back. "Want to come along?"

"Not in that coffee-pot you got!" he sneered. "Got a 'chute on?"

Well, to save a lot of argument, I climbed out and put one on. "There!" I snapped the last buckle. "Feel better?"

"Some," he admitted. "After all, you know, I'm out here to watch things, and you still owe me twelve bucks' hangar rent. How would the city ever collect if you got knocked off?"

Can you imagine a guy cracking wise, like that? But seeing as how he was my brother, I only grinned.

I took on about two thousand feet, and headed straight across the brush for Centralia. It was darn' pretty, flying. Down below there were patches of fog hanging in the low places and cañons, the sun just starting to break them up. Off to the left I could see Mt. Rainier poking her nose through the clouds. The snow on top of her crown looked glittery and white in the morning sun. And off to the west, as far as I could see, there was water—the grand old Pacific Ocean, stretching on and on to far places that only other men and races know. Some day I'm going to build me a special ship and head into the setting sun. There are lands out there I'd like to see.

Well, to get back to the story, everything was going fine. The old plane was

purring like a contented cat, and all was right with the world. Centralia and Chehalis came under the nose and slowly drifted astern.

I checked my watch as we scudded over the Chehalis field. Twenty-five minutes since leaving Hoquiam. Not bad! The old ship was certainly doing her stuff.

The next towns of any importance were Kelso and Longview. Also, that is where you hit the Columbia River and follow it into Portland. Well, we hit it right on the nose, and then swung down the river toward Vancouver. I had enough gas to make it on through to Pendleton, but I intended to stop off at Vancouver and visit old Dad Bacon. A grand old man he is—runs a repair-shop there, and fine work he does, too.

BUT I never made Vancouver. I suddenly noticed a peculiar smell and felt something stinging sharply against my face.

"Well, Cochrane, old boy, what's this?" I wondered, wiping my face with my scarf. I'm not long in doubt—the sec' I see it, I know what it is. It's oil! I flicked my eyes over the instruments till I came to the oil-pressure. It was down—not a pound left!

"About time to get this kite down," I thinks, reaching for the switch. There were plenty of fields down there, and as I now had about four thousand feet, I wouldn't have any trouble getting her in. I grabbed the switch and started to flip it off, when suddenly the whole front end seemed to blow up in my face. Flames and smoke poured back over the pit so heavy they almost blinded me.

From there on, I can't remember so well. Things were happening plenty fast. I remember cutting the gas-line and switch, and slapping at the flames at the same time.

REAL EXPERIENCES

I was just beginning to wonder what was going to happen, when it suddenly dawned on me that I had a 'chute.

You should have seen me! I left that ship like a bullfrog diving into a lily-pond, all sprawled out and shouting bloody murder. I didn't know I was yelling, but some people on the ground said they heard me, so it must be so. I fell on my head and back with my feet in the air, and I remember seeing that ship going away from me, a big black greasy roll of smoke trailing after it.

Well, I didn't do anything for an instant or two, just drifted along. It's a nice feeling, falling. Then I came to and started to claw for the ring; then I found that I had had hold of it all the time! I jerked that ring so hard I almost tore it in two, and did I get results! When that 'chute popped open, it darn' near tore me to pieces, but it was a fine feeling just the same. I liked it.

"Well," thinks I, "if it hadn't been for that crackpot brother of mine—" And then I got so weak I thought I was going to faint. I finally got control of myself and looked around for my ship, but I couldn't locate it.

"The heck with airplanes!" thinks I. "If I ever get out of this mess, I'll never sit in another plane!"

THE ground was coming up fast now. I grabbed hold of the risers and pulled my legs up to help take up the shock of landing, and plowed right into a big willow tree for my pains. I never thought a tree could have so many branches and sharp jiggers to gouge a fellow with; when I finally managed to unhitch myself and get to the bottom of the tree, I didn't have enough clothes left to cover a fan-dancer's modesty.

I pieced together what was left, and headed toward civilization. I had gone about a hundred yards when I heard a fellow sing out like a wild Indian.

"Hey!" he yodeled. "We don't allow no nudists on this side of the river. Git back whar you belong, before I sprinkle yore hide with buckshot!"

Well, that was almost too much to stand. My ship gone, a two-hundred-dollar parachute hanging in ribbons, the clothes torn off my back, and now this apple-knocker accusing me of being a nudist!

Assuming what little dignity I could, I stalked haughtily toward this defender of public morals. But I didn't get far, because this homespun wonder suddenly

raised his scattergun in no uncertain manner, and I could tell by the determination of his stance that he meant business.

"Just a minute, Mister," I implored. "Do I look like a nudist?"

"Well, I dunno," he answers. "But what's the idea of traipsing around with all your clothes off, if you aint?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," I explains with exasperation. "I've had an accident."

"Shore does look like something happened to you!" he admits.

"Of course, something happened!" I answers. "My plane caught on fire, and I had to bail out. I landed in a tree. That's the reason my clothes are all torn off."

"Was that your airplane that just landed over in the next field?" he asks.

"It must be," I answers. "Mine was the only one in the air."

"Well, dog my cats!" this guy mutters. "So that ship is yours! What you guys won't think of next! Well, come along, sonny, and I'll show you where it lit."

We climbed a fence and walked through a small grove of trees. And there, sitting in a wheat field, was the ship. And believe it or not, she was right-side up!

Well, I let out a grunt of surprise, rocked back on my heels, and stared at that darn' thing for a minute or two before I could catch my breath. Why, the prop wasn't even cracked! No sir! And not a scratch! The oil-line had broken, but outside of that I couldn't find a darn' thing wrong with it. Where the fire came from, I haven't been able to figure out to this day. And how that ship managed to glide from four thousand feet and make a landing—well, you explain it; I can't.

To make a long story short, I talked the knight of the shotgun into driving into town and bringing me some clothes. And that afternoon, after repairing the oil-line, I took off, and completed the trip.

NOW, there's just one thing that has bothered me since this accident. The ship caught on fire; I had a 'chute on; so I bailed out. But supposing (and I hope that's all it ever amounts to) I hadn't worn a 'chute? Do you think the fire would have blown itself out? Or would I have cooked? I'm still trying to figure that one out.

(P.S. I wear a 'chute now even for hangar flying.)

Storming the Cotta

An officer of the Philippine constabulary gives this vivid account of a savage battle.

By MAJOR CALVIN CARTER

ALL the important leaders of the Bag-sak revolt had been accounted for with the exception of Sahipa, who still remained at large with his band and many rifles. He had been located and attacked twice, with disastrous results to the Government; but his new hide-out had not yet been found.

Information was received that Kamad, one of Sahipa's lieutenants and a known murderer, had separated from the band and was hiding in a house on a wooded mountain-side. At three o'clock one morning I left camp with twenty men and marched to this spot, arriving at day-break. We surrounded the house, which was constructed of nipa palm and split bamboo, and shouted to Kamad several times to come down. There had been several instances of this kind where Moros had remained quietly in their homes until soldiers, thinking no one was present, carelessly entered—and were cut to pieces with no opportunity to defend themselves. One of my close friends, Lieutenant Hovey of the United States Navy, had only recently lost his life in this fashion on the Island of Basilan. So I took no chances and ordered my men to fire volley after volley through the thin walls until there was no possibility of any possible occupants in the house remaining alive. We might as well have saved our ammunition, for the place was vacant.

On the return march to camp we passed near the scene of Sahipa's first fight, and went into the fort to examine the interesting maze of underground passages and the bamboo tubes which were still in place. A Constabulary doctor was with us, and asked to go by Sahipa's second *cotta*, as these things were new to him, and he wished to see all he could before leaving for more peaceful parts of the Philippines. We had not yet had breakfast, and it took considerable persuasion to get me to accommodate him, but I finally consented, little knowing what fate had in store for us on a supposedly sightseeing trip.

That the second *cotta* might be reoccupied was the farthest thought from my mind. Consequently I was not using the caution I should have, when we approached it. I marched up the hill at the head of my column of soldiers, who were in single file, and being somewhat weary and hungry, strung out for some distance.

My eyes were fastened on the trail, which was strewn with small rocks, making walking difficult. When within about fifteen feet of the bamboo surrounding the fort, some instinct made me suddenly look up, and I saw a rifle sticking through an opening. Behind it could plainly be seen the whites of a man's eyes.

During these troubled times all officers carried, in addition to their pistol, a sawed-off shotgun loaded with buckshot. The pistol was worn in its holster, and the shotgun carried in the hand ready for instant use against some *juramentado* who might, as had been done on several occasions, jump from the grass and attack the head of a column.

When I saw the gun and eyes, there was no time to think, but I automatically jumped to one side just as the man fired, and at the same time let him have a load of buckshot full which must have nearly torn his head off at that distance. However, I did not tarry to investigate the result of the shot, but was back over the brow of the hill and behind a boulder in about two jumps.

My opinion, which coincided with that of the friendly Moro datu who had guided us to Kamad's supposed hiding-place, was that Sahipa had just reoccupied the *cotta* shortly before our arrival, and that it would be suicidal to attack with the small force I then had at my command. I accordingly sent runners to the town of Jolo, some fifteen miles distant, asking for reinforcements and also requesting a mountain gun. At the same time I sent to my camp for food supplies.

My men took positions in skirmish formation along the brow of the hill and began trying to draw the Moros' fire in

order to estimate the number of men and guns we had to contend with. Another reason for this move was that we knew Sahipa must be getting short on ammunition. This was difficult and expensive for him to obtain, and his two encounters with Government troops must have depleted his supply.

The bugler sounded the charge, and while Sahipa and his men did not know its significance, the stirring notes conveyed some thought of action to them, for they began firing wildly. My men, of course, had been instructed to disregard the signal. It was now certain that there were a large number of men and firearms in the fort, and we settled down for a long wait. There was plenty of diversion to keep us from being bored. We were close enough for loud conversation, and the native soldiers kept up an exchange of shouted taunts with the outlaws.

A woman, emulating Datu Tahil's wife at Bagsak, climbed onto the parapet and began screaming that we were cowards for not coming on and fighting instead of hiding behind rocks. Not a shot was fired at her, until suddenly a Moro appeared at her side, parted the bamboo fence, and with barong uplifted, charged toward our line. Just a crazed "amok," but he died without killing his Christian.

OUR discomfort was partly allayed when food arrived from the camp, but it had begun to rain and there was no hope for shelter nor of escape from spending the night trying to sleep on the wet, muddy ground. Shortly before dark a company of Scouts, commanded by Captain McEllery, and a company of Constabulary, commanded by Captain Opperman, arrived at the scene, considerably relieving the tension. These officers, being of higher rank, superseded me in so far as military operations were concerned, but I was still supreme as Deputy Governor of the District. We all agreed that Sahipa was not to have another opportunity to steal away under cover of darkness, and arranged the troops accordingly.

After a most miserable night, the rain falling incessantly, we again began to attract the Moros' fire, and had some success at sniping by expert riflemen. One Scout sergeant climbed on the limb of a dead, fallen tree and was gleefully calling his shots until a bullet caught him squarely in the heart.

There was no mountain-gun ammunition—shrapnel—left in Jolo; but Captain

McEllery had brought a three-pound mortar; and Lieutenant Sandford of the United States Army, who had West Point training in the use of artillery, had accompanied the expedition. The mortar was placed on an adjoining hill, and Sandford mathematically figured the range so accurately that the first shell landed squarely in the middle of the *cotta*, spraying mud and dirt several feet high but failing to explode. Shot after shot was fired from this cannon with the same results, and had any one of them exploded as they were supposed to, it would have caused havoc and destruction. We learned later that the ammunition for this gun was of the vintage of 1898 and had naturally deteriorated after so long a period.

There had never been any question in our minds but that we could take the *cotta* at any time we wished, and the preliminary delay was caused by the desire to save as many of our soldiers' lives as possible. At two P.M. we decided to rush the *cotta* from two sides, the Scouts advancing from one side and the Constabulary from the other. The men were lined up in skirmish formation in their respective positions to await the order to start.

During the morning we had tried out both rifle and hand grenades, but very few of them had exploded because of the soft mud within the *cotta*; and the Moros had begun throwing them back with better results when they struck the rocks behind which we were taking cover. This form of offense was therefore soon discontinued.

The order to advance was given, and the two lines moved rapidly, pouring a hail of bullets into the *cotta*. The bamboo fence had been only partially repaired since the last fight and was soon demolished, and soldiers swarmed over the trenches. The outlaws fought to a finish, not one of them asking for mercy or offering to surrender. It was a pitiful sight to look at the crumpled dead bodies of people who, after all, had been misguided by their religious leaders; but the Island of Jolo was once more in a state of peace, and the friendly, industrious citizens could go about their farming without fear of predatory raids by the outlaws.

There was general rejoicing in my company when we were ordered back to Cotabato; and I must admit that I felt no regret when I leaned over the rail of the boat and waved good-by to the "smiling Isles of Sulu."

STAMPEDE TRAPS GIRL In RATTLER'S DEN!

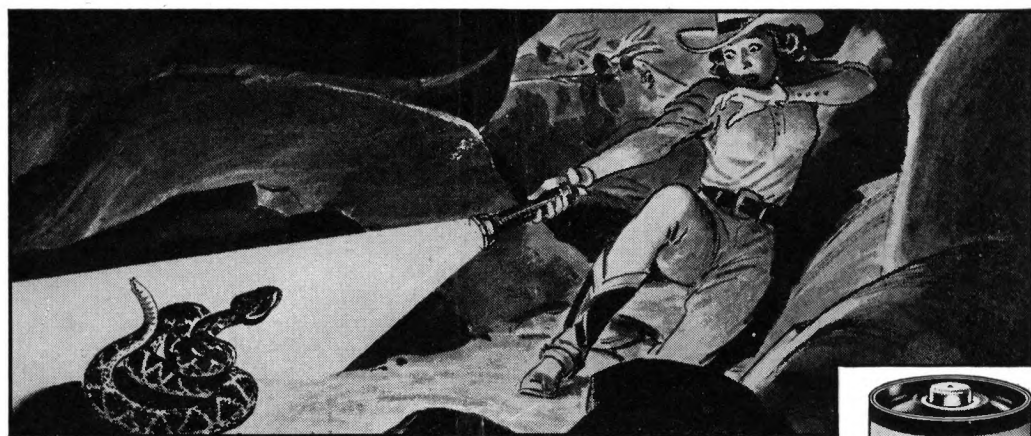
MAE OLSON
Route No. 1, Hudson, Wisconsin



① "While living on a North Dakota cattle ranch, I rode over to a neighbor's place one night to borrow some sugar," writes Mrs. Olson. "Passing our cattle corral on the way home, I saw the heavy gate slowly opening—and 500 milling cattle inside!"



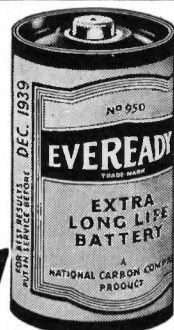
② "I dismounted and ran for the gate—but too late! A dozen stampeding steers poured through the opening! Sheer instinct told me to run for a hillside cave we had dug as kids. I just made it—diving headlong into the black hole... and a new menace!"



③ "Somehow, the flashlight in my hand lighted as I sprawled on my face. It spotted a coiled rattlesnake not two feet away—eyes glittering in the piercing beam! Between hoof and fang, I was in a bad fix! Frozen with terror, I waited until the pounding hoofs behind me died away—then crawled out backwards, keeping the light on the rattler. You'll never know how grateful I am for those 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries. They were better than an insurance policy that night. (Signed)

Mae Olson

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